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Gabriel Garcia Marquez
was born in 1928 in the small Colombian town of Aracataca.

He spent much of his childhood with his grandparents whom he recalls with special fondness as magical

storytellers and the early inspiration for many of his novels and short stories.



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Ink Drawings (1978, 12"x9")

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From the Editor

AFTER Neruda Marquez is the most eloquent chronicler of the Latin American people. He is one of them and at the same time the best historian of Latin America from the outside as it were. The 'magical' element in his writing springs from this quality of being an insider and an external chronicler at the same time. The "magical realism" can, therefore, be quite fascinating. However there is nothing 'magical' or "mystical" about his writing. His work is easily the most glorious "chapter" of the grand novel Latin America is writing"; which is how the Latin American writing was described by Neruda.

We feature an interview by him (translated from the Russian) which gives some idea of how the novelist looks at the arts, society, dictatorship and the like.

S.P.Ganguly in his essay discusses this writer against the backdrop of Latin American writing and in terms of the world of his work.

In our review section we feature an interesting review of Michael Coulson's translation of Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam* by K.V.K.Sundaram. Its discussion of translation and its problems will, we hope, be very stimulating.

We also carry a review of Prasanna's production of Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* in Delhi. It seems a little unusual for a quarterly like this to carry a review of a single production. The reason why we did so is the unseemly manner in which the production was treated. There is sufficient reason to believe that Prasanna was commissioned to do the play with a view to showing that production eventually in the Festival of India, London. The decision was changed. The controversy on that

decision did not do any credit to the Government. It is perhaps a useful thing to know that the relationship between the arts and the State is not a happy one. India Festival or Film Festivals notwithstanding it is not likely to improve either.

Prasanna's 'Tughlaq' was not liked by many. It has been our tradition and Jagannatha Pandit, the famous poet of the seventeenth century put it neatly: *Dillishwaro wa Jagadishwaro wa* (The lord of Delhi: the lord of the whole world). What Prasanna's production tried to do was not to look at Tughlaq as an *Ishwara* (The Lord) either of Delhi or of the world but simply as a fallible human being. The effort met with a very predictable response. We felt we should react to this phenomenon.

Malini Bhattacharya traces the history of the IPTA in Bengal. Rekha Kamath discusses Brecht's theory of didactic theatre. So much for theatre. Arun Khopkar has just completed a book in Marathi on Guru Dutt and his films (being translated in English and Hindi). Excerpts from his book are featured in this issue. Ashish Rajadhyaksha reviews the British Film Institute's book on Godard and his films.

We include a set of drawings by Vivan Sundaram which he made during his trip to Mexico in 1978. In view of the feature on Marquez who embodies his concern about power in 'fantastic structures' these drawings which are improvizations on a corresponding culture should be of interest.

Let us repeat what we said last time. Join us in this endeavour. Contributions, donations, subscriptions, advertisements, responses to specific articles and arguments are all welcome. GPD

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The IPTA in Bengal

Malini Bhattacharya

WHEN ONE even begins to talk about Bengali theatre today, one has to talk of the 'theatre movement' in Bengal. That such a movement exists and that it struggles to establish the performing arts on an alternative economic basis from that of the thriving commercial theatre is entirely due to the tradition created by the IPTA in the 1940s. This movement is not confined to sporadic, amateur efforts with a restricted audience of the initiate, but has deep, far-reaching roots even in the remotest corners of the state; and however much the hundreds of small, theatrical groups may differ from each other in their specific political persuasions and their modes of experimentation, they still put up a solid common front against large private ownership in the sphere of the performing arts and the cultural values it represents. This, too, is largely a legacy of the IPTA. Yet, in certain ways, the legacy has been a difficult one, and it has left unresolved controversies within the movement itself; the decline of the people's theatre movement in the late 1940s and its fragmentation, which led ultimately to the 'Group Theatre Movement' is but a manifestation of these difficulties. In this article, I will try to indicate how the questions raised by the IPTA and left unresolved by its dissolution in the 1950s, have continued to affect the theatre movement in Bengal.

The first bulletin of the IPTA brought out in 1943 is headed by the epigraph: 'People's theatre stars the people'.¹ The specific application of the term 'people' is not made very clear in the bulletin. But from the work of the IPTA, one may infer that the term referred mainly to the vast masses of workers, peasants and various sections of the petty bourgeoisie whose 'struggles for freedom, economic justice and a democratic culture' all over the world are found to be the predominant characte-

ristic of the period following the First World War. Romain Rolland, whose idea of a 'people's theatre' as an alternative to decadent bourgeois theatre may have been at work behind the inception of the IPTA,² had thought of it mainly as theatre *for* the people. But in the Indian context the term came to have a richer significance, because in a semi-feudal set-up, the tardy growth of industrial capitalism has ensured a longer lease of life to indigenous forms of folk culture. In many instances, they have survived, though in a moribund form, and have not virtually gone out of existence as in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe. And in the first bulletin of the IPTA it was resolved on this basis to build up a theatre not only *for* the people, but also *of* the people and *by* the people. 'It is not a movement which is imposed from above but one which has its roots deep down in the cultural awakening of the masses of India ... which seeks to revive the lost in that heritage by interpreting, adopting and integrating it with the most significant facts of our people's lives and aspirations in the present epoch.'³

The main task of the people's theatre movement as the IPTA bulletin saw it was to coordinate, even to some extent anticipate two demands that were taking shape spontaneously out of the cultural scene: (a) the demand for new experimentations in dramatic forms which the commercial theatre, bound by the naturalistic conventions of the nineteenth century European stage it was modelled on, did not allow; (b) the demand for the presentation in drama of contemporary reality as it emerged out of the democratic struggles of people all over the world against imperialism and fascism. Its organizational character enabled the IPTA to explore alternative cultural formations still prevalent in non-urban areas and to establish a link between the traditional and the contemporary. Appropriation of such genres as the Kabigan, while keeping intact their vitality in relation to their true milieu in society came to be contemplated. The idea was for cultural activists to go to the people and to activate them to create new theatrical forms for themselves.

'People's Theatre', it is quite clear, represented an ideal yet to be achieved. Though it is not explicit in the theoretical framework of the IPTA bulletin, the activities of the IPTA in the 1940s lead towards a wholly new conception of the relationship with the consumers of culture. In fact, Professor Hiren Mukherjee's speech at the 1943 conference openly declares battle against the commercialization of the performing arts.⁴ Where entertainment is a commodity controlled by large private owners and the constraint of the so-called 'laws of the market' operates upon it, the relationship between the actual producers of culture and its consumers remains a restricted one. 'The fetishism of commodities'

which Marx explains so succinctly in *Capital*, Book I,⁵ dominates the sphere of cultural activities as well. The IPTA in creating the demand for a professional theatre which would none the less run on non-commercial lines, was initiating a struggle which, of course, could not be complete until the economic base of Indian society itself underwent a structural change, until ownership of products, both material and cultural, came to the people themselves. This would also mean that the people as consumers of culture would no longer be a faceless mass sitting passively in the cosy darkness of the auditorium, but their relationship with the producers of culture would be one of continuous active exchange. This is the implicit objective which caused the idea of a 'people's theatre' to manifest itself in the form of a movement which would involve the large masses of people in their capacity as both producers and consumers of culture. It is this awakening to a new idea of cultural relationship which can only be possible in a new social order which made the IPTA see the theatre movement as a part of the 'people's struggles for freedom, economic justice and democratic culture'.

The idea of a people's theatre, then, is of necessity a political idea. But precisely because of this, it cannot wait to be realized in some distant future when the social order will change. It has to start working on the existing basis. The theatre has traditionally provided a thriving form of cultural activity for the urban middle class in Bengal. In fact, when the IPTA talked of the large masses of people as the possible consumers of culture, the category certainly did not exclude the urban middle class in Bengal. The call to resuscitate folk culture was not a purely revivalist slogan, but embodied the strategy of promoting a vigorous exchange between different existing forms of entertainment, and of being the cultural forum where urban and rural sections of the struggling people might communicate. This enabled the IPTA to some extent, to provide the urban middle class with a kind of drama they had not thought possible, and on the other hand, at least in some rural areas, to reach a mass audience which had known nothing but traditional forms of folk entertainment before.

To wean the urban middle class away, to some extent, from the commercial theatre and to provide the rural masses with entertainment which would have some echoes of contemporary reality, a new drama was immediately required. This would, of course, be an intermediate product, reflecting the contradiction between the existing reality of Bengali theatre and the historical need for change. But the first IPTA bulletin expresses the urgent demand for innovations and experimentations of all kinds which embody the change in the historical situation.

The IPTA did not discard the proscenium-stage; nor did it altogether do away with the naturalistic effects which had become associated with it. Nor were they able to release themselves or the urban middle class audience in Calcutta from the stranglehold of the big theatre owners. In Calcutta, it was on the commercial stage that they were compelled to produce their plays and there was no means by which they could reach the audience once the big theatre owners, threatened by the success of *Nabanna* (*The Harvest Festival*), the IPTA's best-known production, refused to hire out their boards to them. On the other hand, an *impasse* arose in connection with *Nabanna* because after a time, one of the co-producers of the play, Shambhu Mitra, refused to allow the play to be taken to the countryside on the ground that the high quality of the performance could not be maintained except on a revolving stage.

What then did *Nabanna* do? For it did bring about a great change in the Bengali theatre, with all its limitations. It seems to me that its signal achievement was to use the naturalism which dominated commercial theatre to a totally new purpose and in doing this, it was enabled to go beyond the prescribed limits of naturalism. The fact of its success both in Calcutta and in some district towns was evidence to the demand for such experimentation; but it also spearheaded a movement which to some extent created such demand among the audience. At the same time, it explored the possibility of finding new audiences apart from the urban middle class one, in a manner that would be totally unthinkable for the exponents of commercial theatre. It is true that outside Calcutta it was performed mostly in the trail of meetings and conferences organized by the Communist Party or its different mass fronts like the Kisan Sabha, and the IPTA appeared as a cultural rearguard to these organizations. This meant that they were performing in front of people who were already participants in the political struggle of which the cultural struggle was a part, people who were already familiar with the militant theme of *Nabanna*. But it was still a great achievement to give dramatic form to what was emerging as a new political reality and but for the breakdown of the IPTA movement in the 1950s, might have served as the first step towards building up a mass organization which would be able to establish cultural links even in those areas where little other political work had been done.

Nabanna was not produced overnight. It was preceded by a series of one-act plays which served as thumb-nail sketches on specific topical issues. The chief credit of these plays lies in introducing burning social questions on the stage in a manner totally inaccessible to the commercial

theatre. But in a sense, they were quite obviously propaganda plays coming in the wake of slogans raised by the Communist Party at the time. They were simply dramatic illustrations of these slogans.

Nabanna, which is a full-fledged play in four acts, has a more complex structure. Its experimentations with realism being on a much broader scale than in the shorter plays, its presentation of a political thesis has to be much more indirect. A greater individualization of characters was absolutely necessary, and this made it all the more difficult to present the historical typicality of the dramatic situation through them. For instance, Pradhan Samaddar, the central character is not just an individual peasant, or a statistical entity; he represents, though unconsciously, an analytical outlook on the crisis in the life of the Bengali peasant in 1942-43. The famine which devastates his family is not an accident, a natural disaster, but a man-made situation; and the individual woes of Pradhan have to be linked with this situation through the dramatic form. So it shows a misunderstanding of the intention of the play to complain, as some critics did at the time, ⁶ that it is highly improbable for one single family to go through the vast range of disasters that the Samaddar family did. But that such criticism could be raised probably shows that the difficulty of the task was reflected in the body of the play itself and the typicality of the situation could not be fully realized within the play. It also probably meant that, at least so far as the urban middle class audience was concerned, the play offered more of an appeal to their sentiments, which was aroused by the personal aspect of the misery of Pradhan and his family, than to their critical faculty.

Shambhu Mitra, the co-producer of the play, points out how the 'episodic character' of the play was maintained even after the editing.⁷ Indeed it is further emphasized by ending each scene with the climactic point of a particular episode and by utilizing the revolving stage to make quick shifts of scene. The abrupt ending of the scene breaks up the single-track movement of narrative, and transfers the audience with great flexibility from one aspect of social life to another, from the woes of the peasants in their village homes to the hoarder's den, from relief kitchen to charitable dispensary, from the wedding feast to the beggars scrounging for food near the dustbin, from the child dying of malnutrition to the village-wife being approached by the city tout, so that although the main focus is on Pradhan and his family, the approach to their problems is a multilateral one and the sensationalism of individual scenes gives way to an analytical linking up of the different segments of social reality. The limitations of naturalism are not wholly done a-

way with, but in certain respects they are transcended. Unconcern with the naturalism of stage props was signified by the simple canvas backdrop that was used throughout the play, though again, naturalistic effects were not altogether discarded. Another aspect of the flexibility of the production was that although the proscenium-stage was said to be indispensable for it, *Nabanna* was successfully performed quite a few times outside Calcutta on inferior, even makeshift stages. This was possible because team-spirit and the capacity of making do with available resources was considered to be more important than technical paraphernalia.

One hears of the play being performed outside Calcutta against heavy odds. On one occasion, at a Kisan Sabha conference, the troupe nearly had to abandon the play because of a heavy storm and pelting rain, although there were twenty to twenty-five thousand people waiting to watch it. In the end, it was decided that the audience could not be let down and the play was performed successfully. So far as the urban middle class audience was concerned, they were initially moved rather than repelled by the totally new brand of realism *Nabanna* had brought on the stage. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, a popular English daily, reviewed the first performance in the following terms: "For the first time since Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nildarpan*, a truly peasants' drama has come upon the Bengali stage."⁸ In fact, in *Nildarpan*, the actual tillers of the soil, though they occupy a large part of the play, are not the central characters. In *Nabanna*, the main focus is on the peasants, they speak their own rugged language, their appearance is authentic and not synthetic; and still they are accepted by the urban middle class audience which had been used so far to stage conventions of a very different kind. Yet *Nabanna* was unable to push these advantages beyond a certain limit and the very fact of its success seemed to lead the theatre movement into a blind alley. The technical excellence of *Nabanna* seemed to preclude its being followed up by a second experiment which might turn out to be less excellent technically. Also, while it blazed a new trail, it created problems of its own which had been unknown to the commercial theatre. Sisir Bhaduri's comment, that the visual and emotional taxation that this 'beggars' theatre' imposed upon its audience would not allow it to be performed on a regular basis unless it was aided by the state, had a grain of truth in it. In its subsequent performances in Calcutta, *Nabanna* was unable to draw as large audiences as it had initially done. So the problem was of continuing and developing the new form of audience reaction *Nabanna* had inspired. On the other hand, in its performances outside Calcutta, the IPTA activists confronted a totally new kind of audience, which though politically aware, found the

Nabanna-type play quite unfamiliar as a cultural form. As it may be expected, response was not always immediate. Here, *Nabanna* merely broached, and did not solve, the question of communication gap.

Self-criticism by the Bengal wing of the IPTA at the annual conference of 1946⁹ pointed at the paradox that the success of *Nabanna* was responsible for the apathy to low-cost productions and non-urban audiences that had crept into the organization. The problem of getting continuous financial returns from the performances simply in order to survive, while maintaining the non-commercial character of the organization, was also causing a headache in the 1946. In the course of the debate that ensued, however, the contradictions between the different aspects within the theatre movement came to be regarded as ingrained limitations rather than as problems to be solved through the movement itself. For example, in the debate on technical excellence versus 'simple and direct' art for the people, it was assumed by both sides that technical excellence has only one standard – that set up by the box-stage with its multiplicity of props; this leads to the supposition that 'technique' is a redundancy for a 'simple and direct' art for the people. It is forgotten that in the latter case 'technical excellence' might lie in flexibility in being able to make the best use of available resources. This shows that the IPTA had no clear picture of its own objective. This theoretical weakness within the IPTA was in fact the repercussion of a weakness within the left movement as a whole. In the 1950s individual opportunism succeeded in paralyzing the organization, only because the theoretical flaw had affected organizational practice.

The 'people's war' line taken up by the Communist Party in 1942 formed the keynote of all IPTA programmes. It was a remarkable achievement of the Communist Party at this stage that through its mass organizations it was able to awaken a massive response to the global danger of fascism and to build up a broad anti-fascist front, immediately after the failure of the popular upsurge of anger against the British in August 1941. But this correct interventionist line was hampered in the execution by the fact that, at this time, the programme of the party itself did not go far beyond the programme of the mass front.

The analysis of the Indian revolution as being in the stage of a people's democratic revolution did not emerge until 1948 and in the absence of such analysis, the notion of a 'people's war' tended to be interpreted and implemented in a reformist manner. The report on 'reformist deviation' presented at the second Congress of the Communist Party in 1948 seems to put its finger on a very real problem when it

describes the deviation in the following manner: "In the name of grow more food, abjuration of struggle against the imperialist land system, of the struggle against landlords; in the name of solving the food crisis, helping the iniquitous procurement plan of the government, at least not fighting it out; in the name of having a broad movement raising illusions that even the exploiting profiteering class will be in the movement, thus leading to class collaboration".¹⁰ That this tendency manifested itself in the implementation of the 'people's war' line is proved by the fact that after 1943, the growth of the party organization was stalled. Successes were scored only in those areas where "even in this period our close link with the masses forced us from time to time to take up issues which were agitating their minds, issues of their daily struggle and pushed us forward to defend their day to day interests."

If one admits that one of the functions of communists within a mass organization is to maintain vital links between the 'day to day interests' of the masses and an overall long-term political analysis of the situation, then perhaps one might not be far wrong in thinking that so far as the IPTA was concerned, it made an impact on the cultural scene to the extent that it was able to fulfil this function. Workers on the cultural front themselves seemed to be confident enough about the possibility of combining the anti-imperialist struggle with the anti-fascist struggle. A representative of the AFWAA says: "We want our country's freedom and resistance to fascism; these are not two distinct ideals; they are one and the same."¹¹ But this identity of the 'two ideals' is not something self-evident; and the difficulty of working it out in the sphere of practice sometimes becomes evident in the formulations of the IPTA regarding the crisis embodied in the war. In the first IPTA bulletin, the struggle for the defeat of both fascism and imperialism is acclaimed, but on the whole, the warning against the 'Fascist hordes ... on the border' looms prominent; the oppressiveness of an 'alien bureaucracy' within is mentioned, but its link with the worsening food situation is never brought to the forefront. In the sphere of practice, however, the IPTA activists did not confine themselves to anti-fascist propaganda; the depiction of the crisis in the daily lives of the people, being aggravated by the imperialist regime, became an essential part of their programme. In *Nabanna*, for instance, the ruthless repression of the people in the August movement, and the role of the government and the state in the 1943 famine, though often kept at the level of cautious innuendoes, comes out quite clearly. The most successful activity of the IPTA in Bengal was to build up a fight against the 1943 famine through agitprop methods. Although the Communist Party had declared a tactical truce with the British, the IPTA in its mass front activities, came face-

to-face with the ruthlessness both of the native exploiting classes and the British government which virtually created the famine. Its success in this period must be linked to the fact that instead of mechanically seeking to impose from above the line of 'people's war' on the masses drawn into the fringe of the movement, it identified the anti-imperialist as well as anti-fascist tendencies within the people and sought to incorporate these into sustained, organized activities.

In the subsequent period, the bogie of party intervention in the workings of the IPTA was raised by some of the intellectuals within. That the party itself was not very sure of how much it wanted to intervene in the cultural front is clear from the manner in which from the late forties, moving out to rural areas by IPTA activists was virtually discontinued, and also in the manner in which in the Garaudy--Arragon debate, which was taken up by the cultural activists here, the party indirectly put its weight on the side of the Garaudy line (i.e., the line which propagated non-intervention so far as intellectuals and artists were concerned).¹² In the early fifties, the task of organization was also passing on more and more to famous professional people of a liberal bent of mind.¹³ Thus organization tended to exclude the all-important task of politicization. In fact, precisely at the time when outcry against party intervention began, we find the party moving towards a non-interventionist position. The reflections of the revisionist tendency within the cultural front of the party in the 1950s are to be found in the political diffidence of this period and *not*, as some people today think, in the initial broad call to all the democratic forces (not just the workers and their immediate allies) within the sphere of the performing arts.¹⁴ The documents of the IPTA in the fifties retain the broadly democratic outlook in its recruitment policy; but their revisionism is apparent not in the broad recruitment, but in the fact that what they promise after the recruitment is a cultural jamboree under the auspices of the bourgeois landlord government with the maximum opportunity for all individuals as individuals and no effort to build up a platform for collective cultural action. Instead of sustained politicization of cultural workers, there is a growing tendency to neutralize the political content of cultural activities. The ultimate of vagueness is reached when the eighth national conference (1957) declared: "...the arts we pursue have in them qualities that broaden man's mind, stimulate his imagination, widen his vision and liberate him from prejudices, selfishness, lust, fear and inhibitions, and inspire him to help realise a higher order of existence where social justice and unbounded opportunities are not denied to man." In this 'new phase', the 'encouragement to art and culture offered by our Government' is said to be a great factor. It seems to me that such declarations grossly distorted the initial intention of the IPTA.

The other side of this non-interventionism, in fact, was the rigid and mechanical application of a revisionist party line upon the mass organization from above. The non-interventionist policy itself was an imposition of the revisionist political line in the sphere of culture – a bureaucratist manipulation in fact. The implicit faith of the Communist Party in this period in the progressive role of the Congress government in the development of national culture and for the maintenance of world peace is matched by the IPTA's confining its activities mainly to the propagation of social harmony and world peace, as the cultural wing of the Communist Party. This is precisely the point where in spite of its broad call to cultural 'workers and writers irrespective of caste, creed and religion' it began to lose its mass character, and splinter groups claiming their origin from the IPTA were gradually formed on the fringes of the theatre movement. It seems to me that it was this non-interventionism and not too much interference which split up the theatre movement.

The revisionist tendency, of course, had already emerged triumphant early in 1947, when the Communist Party came out with unconditional support for the compromise between the nationalist leaders and the British Government. The left sectarianism which appeared in the next two years as a reaction against this offers a curious mirror image to the earlier revisionism and repeats its mistakes in the reverse. During this period, there seems to have been a misdirected effort towards imposing something like party discipline on the members of the mass front, making it compulsory for members of the cultural front to join trade union or Kisan Sabha organizations, and for abandoning the question of technical efficiency and experimentations in the name of 'simple and direct art' with broad mass appeal. Here we find intervention of the totally wrong kind which ultimately have the same result as non-interventionism. By demanding from middle class non-communist members of the cultural front what they were neither willing nor able to do at that stage, such directives could only impede their doing what they might have done in the cultural movement. In the course of the polemics which raged on this issue, the great Bengali novelist Manik Bandopadhyay, who was an active member both of the Communist Party and its cultural front, analyzed the call to 'all progressive writers' to 'abandon the pen and take up the gun' as 'petty bourgeois left-wing adventurism' which was in reality an unconscious disguise for 'reformism', for "an implicit abandonment of the struggle, a call to writers and artists to give up the only form of struggle they were capable of at that moment." This¹⁵ has appeared to me to be the most accurate analysis of the tendency in the cultural front

I am talking of in this paragraph. The second unabashed spate of reformism of the fifties is but the logical corollary to this.

The success of *Nabanna* sprang from the right kind of intervention by the cultural activists within the IPTA. It broke new ground in production, in acting, in technique and in content. Although it tended to remain confined to the sophisticated revolving stage itself, it established a new standard of technical perfection by opening new vistas of possibility for low-cost productions in backward areas. But the experimental spirit that had been there behind *Nabanna* is dampened in the subsequent years. Bijon Bhattacharya's *Jeeyan-Kanya*, first performed in 1947, was a symbolic play written in the operatic mode on the theme of all-party unity propagated by the Communist Party at that time. It is a technically exciting play, makes use of folk lore and folk-songs and is a much more direct embodiment of the then party line than *Nabanna* had been. Yet its inauthenticity as a play seems to be the cultural reflex of the inadequacy of the political line that it represents. With all its efforts at innovation, it can serve as an excellent example of the manner in which the IPTA was reduced from an expanding mass organization to the limited cultural wing of a party treading the revisionist road. The situation today in the theatre movement in Bengal may serve as a commentary on the situation in the 1940s and the 1950s. On the one hand, there is Gana Natya Sangha (originally the Bengal branch of the IPTA) reconstituted in 1967 and flourishing in non-metropolitan areas where the communist movement is expanding. But it does not have the same standing as the IPTA, and its branches constitute but a small fragment of the hundreds of non-commercial groups thriving all over the state. The history of these groups starts with the fragmentation of the IPTA in the fifties from the platform of freedom for experimentations of all kinds and a total reorientation of dramatic art. Considering the paralyzed state IPTA was in, it was probably a sign of health that small groups should strike out on their own. Something like Bohurupi's historic production of Tagore's *Raktakarabi* shows how even while distancing itself from the IPTA, the Naba Natya Andolan (New Theatre Movement) utilized its lessons. Bohurupi's production was a successful appropriation of a classic text, firmly applying its symbolism to contemporary reality. The Group Theatre Movement which followed has preserved a strong anti-authoritarian character and a great sense of professional freedom. Ideologically it is the antithesis of commercial theatre. But by its very nature, it would not come under a large organizational discipline as the IPTA once represented. In fact, in its experimentations, it has dropped the political concept of a people's theatre altogether.

Without experimentations, a theatre movement cannot progress. Coming to the sixties, we find the theatre groups experimenting with Western models of all kinds, in order to break away from prevailing naturalistic conventions. Pirandello on the one hand and Ionesco on the other become popular models. While techniques of living theatre are incorporated in a play like *Ebam Indrajit* (1965), Brechtian adaptations explore other possibilities of non-naturalistic drama in the subsequent period. At the other end of the spectrum, the Little Theatre Group, at least up to the days of *Angar* and *Kallol*, continued to use principally naturalistic methods for more overtly political subjects. However haphazard such experimentation may seem to be at first sight, the decision of a particular group to take up Pirandello, Ionesco or Brecht cannot be a pure accident. It is not just the novelty of the thing that caused the enormous popularity of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* or *Three Penny Opera* on the Bengali stage; it must have anticipated and reflected certain tendencies within theatre-workers, audiences and perhaps within society as a whole. Transplantations can live only if the soil and the climate are favourable; and theatrical experiments, however ad hoc their status may seem to be, have their *raison d'être* embedded in the historical context. For this very reason, while fully appreciating the necessity and the viability of such experiments, one feels forced to question the ultimate aimlessness of these. Their eclecticism seems to be the sign of a definite tendency within the movement. For instance, devices by which theatrical illusion is disrupted and the audience taken into confidence are adopted from Brecht. Similarly, the idea of blurring the dividing line between the stage and the auditorium by making actors invade the auditorium and by asking members of the auditorium to participate in the action has come to the Bengali stage via Pirandello. But the one or the other is often indiscriminately used without any sense that these actually represent differing intentions towards the audience. In each case, the version of reality that comes out of the challenge thrown out to naturalism is different; Pirandello's reality is bourgeois reality seen in the reverse, it is the negative print of bourgeois reality, while in Brecht's case, bourgeois reality is torn apart and a revolutionary dimension of reality appears. The question of choice between these two versions of reality comes up here; and modern Bengali theatre has largely failed in exercising its choice. This is why the numerous experimentations carried forth from the days of the Naba Natya Andolan have remained at the level of mere experiments. So far as the production of a *new* drama is concerned neither Gana Natya Sangha, nor the other group theatres have made any real advance beyond the mixed naturalistic technique of *Nabanna*, its occasional stylized devices on a broadly naturalistic background.

The trend set by *Nabanna* of presenting the more oppressed classes in society, has become widely – perhaps, too widely -- accepted by sophisticated Calcutta audiences today. Such presentation has reached a very high standard of technical perfection. The smallest physical details in the lives of untouchables, all the intonations of the dialect used by the honey-collectors in the Sunderbans are reproduced on stage with admirable fidelity. The glitter and tinsel of the commercial stage has apparently been done away with. Yet the starkest details of reality may be reduced to decorativeness producing the pleasure of mere voyeurism in the audience, unless the world on the stage is linked up by a logic of direct relevance to the lives of the audience, which belongs mostly to the urban middle class. In the plays I am talking of, the superbly naturalistic effects only succeed in reducing the world on the stage to a show, a self-contained entity. Even when an explosion takes place within this world, the audience does not have an inkling as to how this explosion signifies a reality beyond his class consciousness, and yet radically affecting him, as a part of the same class society. The analytical explicatory techniques needed for this are not made available to him through the drama. Therefore he either remains a detached unconcerned spectator or is egged into a false sense of identification with the *dramatis personae*. In fact, the revolutionary explosion on stage often has a cathartic effect relieving the middle class spectator of any uneasiness he might be feeling in his conscience. Even where the content is anti-authoritarian, it gets dulled and distorted in the unanalytical presentation. As I have noted earlier, this problem had been present in *Nabanna* itself and it has not been subsequently solved.

The problem manifests itself in another form as well. The theatre movement in the late forties and early fifties had been partly impeded by the sense of gap between the level of popular consciousness in the countryside and the artist's insistence on technical perfection. But both the exponents of 'simple and direct' plays for the masses and their opponents had implicitly acknowledged that the best plays needed modern, sophisticated, urban facilities. The best art and art for the people were seen as contradictory in their essence. This spell has not been broken so far.

'People's theatre' had aimed to establish a cultural link among the various social strata, into which, in a class society the 'people' are divided. There are wide cultural gaps and even contradictions among them; yet in a semi-feudal society, the lives and the interests of the urban middle class, the urban working class and the various ranges within the agricultural population from the rich peasant to the agricultural

labour have at least a minimum of common ingredients which alone can serve as the basis of a 'people's theatre'. Of course, this does not mean that it should exclude experimentations of different kinds to suit different audiences, but these efforts, while aimed at a specific group of spectators, may still explore at a cultural level the possibilities of the broad unity of the people as a whole. We could perhaps even think of the same dramatic text being modified and presented from slightly different angles so as to suit the theatrical habits and the levels of consciousness of different audiences. However, in West Bengal today, the theatre movement seems to have abdicated this responsibility. Gana Natya Sangha seems to have lost interest in urban audiences except in areas where there is left-wing trade union activities or when the elections are round the corner. The group theatres on the other hand are mainly operative in Calcutta and in the townships and are led by a few big groups which have their base in Calcutta. It is the metropolis which is the centre of influence.

Today, with the spread of certain mass media to rural areas, the cultural habits of people in these areas have been deeply affected. The big traders in entertainment are out to catch new audiences not only with the Hindi commercial film, but also with the debased urban-centred 'jatra' which has lost its folk-roots and has been taken up as a big profit-making venture. The theatre movement, if it has to establish links among various ranges of audiences, would have to combat such influences. But the Calcutta-based big theatre groups which influence the others are losing the mobility and the flexibility which might have enabled them to lead this combat. They do, of course, perform outside Calcutta, but they merely repeat some of their big successes in the metropolis and often come away with an easy victory. They do not feel the need of reworking their performances so as to suit the specific needs of non-metropolitan audiences. Of the two most successful productions by 'Chetana', one of the best and most well-known groups, *Marich-Sambad*, their first venture, though weak as a play, has the *elan*, the flexibility and the ingenuity which enables it to be performed on any stage with the minimum equipment, while their *Jagannath*, a much tighter production, totally lacks this flexibility. *Marich-Sambad* is repeatedly taken out, but the group does not seem to think in terms either of reworking *Jagannath* to suit non-metropolitan audiences, or of producing new plays for them, although neither this, nor any other group could have survived without the call-shows they get outside Calcutta. Utpal Dutt's best-known plays similarly make excellent use of lavish stage-equipments, but even for that reason usually operates at the level of the urban middle class audience alone.

Badal Sircar's 'third theatre' with its emphasis on low-cost production, its rejection of the proscenium-stage, its deliberate refusal to enter into commercial transactions with the audience (buying tickets not being compulsory) and to go in for commercial advertisements, seems at first glance to throw a challenge to this tendency of going in for 'big' shows. Yet in West Bengal, Badal Sircar's plays, instead of moving out towards a mass audience, limit their appeal to an ever narrower circle of patronage. The alternative theatre we are offered here survives by withdrawal from the battle against the commercial theatre, and seeks to remain untouched by the exigencies of a commercial society by wrongly assuming the self-sufficiency of pure theatrical activities. In effect it tends towards an extreme brand of formalism in the sphere of the theatre. Utpal Dutt's device of fighting commercial theatre with its own weapons may have its own problems, but at least one can understand it better.

The nett result of all this is that with so many experiments behind it, the theatre movement today produces only plays on a set theme within a set structure no less than the commercial theatre does. 'Oppression' and 'revolutionary protest' are so familiar as abstract categories on the stage, that one can just name the characters 'jotedar' and 'peasant' or 'employer' and 'worker' without any specific dramatic working out of these ideas and get favourable audience reaction. The stage idiom, because it does not need to use any concrete, analytical devices such as reflective speech or intellectual dialogue tends to get too repetitive. Innovations which follow from the concrete and detailed working out of set themes are absent. One would expect that this might be remedied if the theatre groups based in suburban and rural areas and having the opportunity of studying folk forms of entertainment, make an effort to use these anew so that the rigidity which has set in may be broken. Gana Natya Sangha has done some laudable work in this direction using 'Tushugan' (a singing match to celebrate the annual festival in honour of a folk heroine) and 'Gambhiragan' (a mixed form of entertainment with musical dialogues in which Shiva is the central character) in some of their productions. But on the whole, Gana Natya Sangha itself prefers to remain on the naturalistic track and repeats the same formula ridden structure used by other theatre groups.

The early IPTA documents quite correctly emphasized the importance of the content of the theatre in relation to its form. People's theatre is of necessity political theatre, because it is interventionist theatre. Its aim is not just to provide refined entertainment, but to work subtly upon the cultural habits of the people involved in it and to sub-

vert the conditioning imposed by the commercial theatre upon its audience. It aspires to go down to the people and activate them to create their own art forms. While it cannot by itself destroy the economic base upon which commercial theatre subsists, it can still prepare the way for the reception of a new kind of drama. It is precisely for this reason that it has to go courageously into experiments. It cannot hope to have any effect on popular consciousness simply by repeating formulae they are already familiar with in the conventional way. New forms are needed as the vehicle of new content.

The reconstituted Gana Natya Sangha by announcing itself to be the 'cultural brigade' of a people's democratic front led by the working class and consisting of workers, peasants and other labouring people,¹⁶ makes its political leanings much clearer than the old IPTA ever did. But it seems to have abrogated some of the responsibilities that the latter had undertaken and thus lost a great deal in the way of manoeuvrability. It has chosen to speak only to the initiated and not to those politically backward sections which have not been brought into the struggle as yet; in fact it has assumed the existence of a people's democratic front at a time when it is still to emerge out of a left and democratic front, even in a politically advanced state like West Bengal. Not only has it been led to neglect the urban middle class and its cultural formations, but even its expansion in recent years among the more oppressed classes seems to have hardly done anything to enable it to explore the cultural formations to be found among them so that new emerge. Of course, even with a most dedicated band of workers this cannot be achieved overnight. But, for all its dedication, Gana Natya Sangha itself seems to be the victim of the urban middle class theatrical conventions it seeks to shun.

In its fifth state conference (1970), Gana Natya Sangha showed itself aware of this technical impasse.¹⁷ The need for concrete historical analysis in the sphere of characterization is emphasized; the playwright while he definitely has to 'take sides', is warned not to reduce the characters to mere mouthpieces of certain viewpoints. Engels' exhortation to allow the logic of the playwright's bias to be worked out through the concrete situation and the action is repeated. But these warnings have so far only had the effect of making playwrights stick to the good old naturalistic mode which cannot take the theatre movement any further. One feels apprehensive that the adoption by the Gana Natya Sangha of a party programme as the programme of the mass front cannot help it to make the technical breakthrough it requires today, because this position causes it to neglect that which *is* for that which *ought to be*. It is

also true that this has restricted its capacity for building up a common platform for the non-commercial theatre groups which already exist today, in spite of the fact that its specific and unambiguous political commitment might have given it the position of leadership in the theatre movement.

The Naba Natya Andolan and subsequently the 'group theatres' in implicitly rejecting the organizational discipline the IPTA had propagated, had also evaded the issue of a people's theatre. The term itself had been deliberately dropped. It is clear that we have reached a stage today where the issue cannot be shelved any more. The urban and sub-urban middle classes that they cater for are, of course, a part of the 'people' – its most vocal and culturally most influential part in fact. But for the theatre movement to see them as such would require a major change both in theoretical position and in practice. This change cannot come individually, nor can it come automatically. It has to come out of the experience of the theatre movement itself. Since acceptable leadership is still lacking, one cannot foresee the needed change in the direction of the theatre movement coming in the near future. Nor can one think at this stage in terms of a new comprehensive organization like the IPTA.

Already, for reasons of its own survival, the group theatre has one foot in the world of commercial entertainment. The splitting-up of groups and individual actors being sucked in by the 'jatra' and the commercial theatre cannot always be explained by the opportunism of individuals. This individualism is a chronic defect of the group theatre movement itself. Gana Natya Sangha, proud of its own organizational ethos, looks at the problem from a moralistic, rather than a truly historical and practical point of view. This means that in spite of the fact that the commercial theatre and the commercialized 'jatra' today has reached the very nadir of debasement, the Group Theatre Movement remains a supplement to it and has not been able to offer any concrete rationale for its displacement in any way. The tasteless, unimaginative, corrupt and blase shows to be found on the commercial stage still continue to attract large crowds.

The legacy that the IPTA has left behind it is not an easy one. Those in the theatre movement who think that the IPTA represented a period of misdirected enthusiasm which is long over are much mistaken. It did not have ready-made formulae to offer to the theatre movement, but it raised new problems finding the solutions for which is still the foremost task before the theatre movement today. It is surprising that

today one hears of 'proletarian theatre' or 'socialist theatre', but not of 'people's theatre'. Surely it is only through the realization of the idea of a 'people's theatre' that one can even come to contemplate the subsequent phases.

- 1 *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-47)*, ed. Sudhi Pradhan. Calcutta, 1979, p.124.
- 2 *The People's Theatre*, Romain Rolland, ed. Sudhi Pradhan. Calcutta, 1980. Foreword by Sudhi Pradhan, p.iii.
- 3 *Marxist Cultural Movement*, p. 129. See also 'The Theatre and The People' by S.K. Acharyya, *ibid*, p. 206.
- 4 *Marxist Cultural Movement*, p. 135.
- 5 Karl Marx, *Capital*. Vol. I, London, 1970, p. 72.
'There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.'
- 6 Hirankumar Sanyal, 'Nabanna'. *Bohurupi*, No. 33, p. 116.
- 7 Interview with Shambhu Mitra. *Bohurupi*, No. 34, p.73.
- 8 *Bohurupi*, No. 34, p.35.
- 9 *Marxist Cultural Movement*, pp.257-58.
- 10 *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, ed. M.B. Rao. Vol. VII, 1978, p. 133.
- 11 *Marxist Cultural Movement*, p. 108.
- 12 *Marx-badi Sahitya Bitarka*, ed. Dhananjoy Das. Calcutta, 1975. Introduction, pp. 74-76.
- 13 Sudhi Pradhan, *Sanskritir Pragati*. Calcutta, 1982, p. 189.
- 14 In the *Preamble to Constitution*. 8th National Conference of the I.P.T.A. (1957-58), it is stated that its membership is 'open to all irrespective of castes, creed and religion who will devote their time and talent in carrying out the aims and objects of Indian Peoples' Theatre Association'. By itself, this is a correct statement of recruitment policy so far as a broad-based democratic front can go. This is not where the reformist deviation appears.
- 15 *Manik-Granthabali*. Vol. XII, Calcutta, 1976, pp. 393-422.
- 16 *Group Theatre*. Vol. IV, No. I, p.84.
- 17 *Group Theatre*. Vol. IV, No. 1, pp. 89-94.

Brecht and Didactic Theatre

Rekha Kamath

IN THE last decade Brecht has gained increasing importance in the Indian theatre scene. His major plays have been translated or adapted in various regional languages, and it is no longer surprising to read of Brecht performances in New Delhi, Calcutta, Pune or elsewhere. The theory of the epic theatre is read and studied assiduously by directors and actors alike, and in some cases one can even speak of Brecht's influence on some directors.

Brecht's popularity is not surprising, when viewed in the socio-political context of the country. The sharpening contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the workers in the cities, and between feudal landlords and landless labourers in the countryside, emphasize the necessity of a politically oriented theatre. If art and theatre too reflect the movements of the times, then they can also contribute towards a better understanding of the manner in which the socio-political nexus functions. Problems need to be identified, so that solutions can be arrived at. By attempting to raise the awareness of the masses, all forms of progressive political art contribute - however indirectly - to the possibility of social transformation.

Brecht's major contribution to theatre aesthetics lies in his attempt to free theatre from its bourgeois limitations of a 'mere form of entertainment'. The epic and the didactic theatre are two different models through which Brecht tried to relate his political understanding with aesthetic activity, in order to give the theatre a definite social and political function. Brecht recognized the fact that if theatre was to become a relevant part of social activity, it would not only have to entertain the masses, but also educate them. The didactic element is therefore an integral part of both the theatre models that Brecht worked with. The reason why in this article emphasis is laid on the model of the didactic theatre is simple. In talks with actors and directors of the Hindi theatre

it was evident that the general postulates of the epic theatre are well-known. (The theory however does not always manifest itself in practice, as is clear from many performances in Delhi.) On the other hand performances of two didactic plays (*The Exception and the Rule* and *The Measures Taken*) clearly showed that they were done without any background information on the theory of the didactic plays. It is very often also not known that these plays differ from the plays of the epic theatre and that the didactic theatre has a different theoretical framework from that of the epic theatre. A systematic study and analysis of the didactic theatre becomes necessary in this context.

Between 1929 and 1931 Brecht wrote five relatively short plays, which he called didactic plays.¹ Having established the pedagogical intentions of these plays through the term given to them, Brecht proceeds to specify the pedagogical aims which are integrated into the elements of the didactic theatre and which are best brought out through a description of these elements.

The most important aspect of the didactic theatre which must be understood, before its other features are dealt with, is the fact that the term 'didactic play' is valid only for those plays from which the actors themselves learn. The pedagogical intentions of the didactic plays manifest themselves only in the actual acting process. A spectator who is a mere observer and who does not take active part cannot undergo the same learning-process. Brecht describes the didactic plays as "art for producers, not for consumers"², thus attacking the passive attitude of the recipient in the bourgeois theatre.

The common feature of all didactic plays lies furthermore in their practical orientation towards experimentation with forms of social behaviour. On the basis of construed situations in theatre, different modes of behaviour - as a reaction to these situations - are critically enacted and discussed, in order to establish their fitness and relevance to the particular situation. The situations themselves vary from instances of revolutionary class struggle (*Measures Taken*) to those connected with the emerging social formation of the collective (*The Ocean Flight* and *Das Badener Lehrstueck vom Einverstaendnis*).

In the process of experimentation with forms of social behaviour, emphasis is laid on the necessity of both action and observation. The unity of these two factors is based on the conceptual unity of theory and praxis, and one of the pedagogical aims of the didactic theatre is a correct and practical understanding of this dialectic. Brecht proceeds

here from the fact that, in order to arrive at correct forms of revolutionary social behaviour, it is necessary not only to be active - in the social context as well as in the context of theatre -, but also to observe in order to be able to assess a given situation theoretically.³ By combining action with discussion, the didactic theatre offers the players a framework within which they can learn - through practical examples - the correct applications of the dialectical unity between theory and praxis.

Linked up with this is a further aspect of the didactic theatre which deals with the spheres of production and consumption. In traditional theatre these two activities are taken over by two different groups of people - the actors and the audience - without any interlinking or interchanging of roles. In the didactic theatre on the other hand, these two activities are alternated by one group of persons who are at times actors and at times spectators. In this manner the didactic theatre emphasizes the dialectical nature of the relationship between the spheres of production and consumption, as is illustrated by Marx in the 'Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy'.

As experiments in forms of revolutionary social behaviour, the didactic plays establish a closer link between an art form and day-to-day life than was possible in any other form of theatre. By establishing this link theatre was not only given a constructive and socially relevant function, but it also had an important role to play in the organization of society. Among the organizational functions of Brecht's didactic plays is the training in collectivism. With reference to *Badener Lehrstueck vom Einverstaendnis*, Brecht writes that as a kind of collective art experiment the play creates the necessary preconditions for the organization of a social collective. Brecht saw in the collective a new social formation which to his mind would replace the outdated bourgeois concept of the 'great individual', and which alone would be in a position to bring about any changes in society. By emphasizing in practice the collective nature of action and analysis, the didactic plays attempt to instil in the actors a collective consciousness. In the model of the didactic theatre Brecht therefore attempts to initiate the social organization of the collective through the means of theatre.⁴

The revolutionary character of the social experiments in the didactic theatre make it evident that it is directed towards revolutionary theatre groups which as a rule are made up of class conscious workers who are also active on the cultural front. Indeed Hanns Eisler, a close associate of Brecht, reiterates at one place that the model of the didactic theatre is conceived of, first and foremost, as amateur theatre, as

an instrument for pedagogical work among students and revolutionary collectives.⁵ The didactic theatre stresses the importance of cultural activity of the proletariat. Brecht saw this activity as part of revolutionary work at the level of the superstructure which has to accompany every social revolution. The concept of literary production as part of social praxis is based on the dialectical relationship between base and superstructure. While determining the nature of revolutionary work in the superstructure, Brecht applies the first of the *Theses on Feuerbach* in which Marx criticizes Feuerbach's mechanical materialism:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism - that of Feuerbach included - is that the thing (*Gegenstand*), reality, consciousness, is conceived only in the form of the object (*Objekt*), or of contemplation (*Anschauung*), but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively.....⁶

Social reality too is a manifestation of human, sensuous activity of practice. The reconstruction of this concept of 'practice' enables Brecht to define literary praxis not merely as a reflection of the economic base, but as a constitutive element of man's productive activity.

Viewed within this framework of productive activity, literary praxis then becomes a socially relevant factor, not merely reflective, but also functionally operative. In the didactic theatre, the productive sphere of the workers is extended to production at the level of the superstructure - determining new social mores - thus anticipating on a minor scale the conditions envisaged by Marx and Engels in a communist society when division of labour no longer exists.

While describing the epic theatre in theoretical writings, Brecht talks of a new 'style of theatre'. The epic theatre, which arose out of Brecht's conscious rebellion against the bourgeois theatre of illusions, confronts the spectators with various aspects of the reality surrounding them. While emphasizing the need and the possibility of revolutionary change, the epic theatre attempts to give the spectators insights into the functioning of social reality. On the basis of these insights gained in theatre, thought-processes are set in motion which gradually lead to the development of a revolutionary consciousness. The pedagogical aim of the epic theatre which is directed towards the spectators lies in the awakening of a revolutionary consciousness among the masses.

While analysing Brecht's criticism of classical bourgeois theatre, it becomes apparent that the main thrust of this criticism was directed against the illusionary nature of this theatre, and not at its institutional

character. Although the epic theatre breaks away from the forms and techniques of bourgeois theatre, it restores at the same time the claim made by classical bourgeois theatre in Germany, namely the claim to educate the masses through the institution 'theatre'. Behind this claim is the tacit understanding that the education of the masses lies in the hands of persons and institutions who by virtue of their intellectual and social position bear the responsibility for this education. In bourgeois society the artist too is given such a position, and the bourgeois dramatist for example uses the institution to propagate the 'unchanging' values of the bourgeois system.

The education of the masses through institutional means; the role assumed by the author, by virtue of a superior intellectual or social position, as the educator of the masses; these are elements of classical bourgeois theatre which are taken over by the epic theatre. At the same time however, it must be pointed out that the pedagogic element in the theatre is on a totally different level from that of classical bourgeois theatre. Whereas the latter was concerned merely with propagating bourgeois values and morals, the epic theatre draws social reality into the focus of its interest and attempts to make the spectator critically aware of the nature of this reality. In both these forms however, the spectator is the recipient of the author's pedagogical aspirations.

By doing away with the traditional distinction between actors and audience (actors and those who pass on the message of the author), the didactic theatre removes the ground from under such advocate attempts. As experimental exercises in revolutionary behaviour the didactic theatre presupposes a revolutionary consciousness among the people taking part in the experiment. The plays offer the actors material for their analysis and discussion of correct forms of action and identify problems which need to be discussed. Through a combination of action and discussion the actors consider the advantages and disadvantages of various forms of action in order to arrive at forms that are appropriate for a given situation.

The epic and the didactic theatre therefore adopt different methodological approaches to the question of the education of the masses. In the epic theatre the responsibility for the education of the masses lies in the hands of the playwright: the playwright educates the masses. In the didactic theatre the role of the dramatist is limited to providing basic material for experimental exercises and for discussion. The actors who already have a revolutionary class-consciousness take their further education into their own hands. Within the framework given by the

nature of the play, they collectively act out, analyse and discuss the suggestions made by the writer, and arrive at conclusions regarding the strategy and tactics of class struggle, and appropriate forms of behaviour in different socio-political situations. The emphasis therefore, lies on the self-education of the masses. The role of the dramatist/intellectual is limited to that of an initiator and adviser.

In terms of aesthetics as well as social function, the didactic theatre represents a more radical form than the epic theatre. However, it would be completely wrong to assume that because the didactic theatre breaks away totally from classical bourgeois traditions, that it is a better or more advanced model than the epic theatre. By taking such a rigid position, we would be ignoring the social context in which art functions, and which determines the relevance and necessity of certain forms over others. Both these theatre models that Brecht worked with, therefore occupy the same position, since their historical, political and social contexts differ.

Brecht carried out his experiments with the didactic theatre in the period between 1929 and 1932. During this time there was a marked increase in revolutionary awareness in Germany as a result of the economic crisis and the mass unemployment which arose from it. The German Communist Party (KPD) was at this time also very active on the cultural front, and this led to the formation of various organizations of workers' culture. Since a large number of workers were organized on the cultural front, and thus brought with them the requisite class consciousness, Brecht could at this time afford to experiment with the model of the didactic theatre. With the emergence of amateur political theatre groups, there was also a correspondingly large demand for suitable texts which would allow for a combination of aesthetic activity and revolutionary pedagogy. The didactic plays were able to fulfill this demand. They gave the organized workers the opportunity of taking part in theatrical activity, while at the same time relating this activity to their social situation

The didactic plays were limited, however, to class-conscious workers, to students of Marxist discussion groups, etc. This combined with their nature as experimental exercises meant that they could not reach large sections of society, as for example the bourgeoisie or even the petty bourgeoisie. With fascism on the increase in Germany, Brecht had to give up these artistic experiments which were limiting in nature. Along with other intellectuals Brecht recognised the need for the politics of a peoples' front against fascism, which would have to



I need no gravestone, but
If you need one for me
I would like it to bear these words:
He made suggestions. He
Carried them out.
Such an inscription would
Honour us all.

Al-Basti & Muktha Associates
Engineers and Contractors, Dubai, U.A.E.

include sections of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. Above all, theatre activity would have to be directed again towards the spectators who would have to be educated in the fight against fascism. Since the socio-political conjuncture was not favourable for continued experiments with the didactic theatre, Brecht gave up these experiments for the time being, and continued his theatre work with the epic theatre, since it had become necessary again to reach a broader audience and expose to them the workings of fascism.

The epic theatre functions as ideology critique, while the didactic theatre confronts this exposed ideological pattern with new forms of praxis. The precondition for experiments with the didactic theatre is however that the masses have a revolutionary class consciousness and the desire to become active themselves. If this precondition is absent the didactic theatre becomes functionally irrelevant and has to be substituted by the epic theatre, which would help in building up a revolutionary class consciousness.

The epic theatre and the didactic theatre are therefore two different theatre models, that not only differ as far as their form is concerned, but also as regards their relevance for different socio-political situations.

The didactic theatre offers many possibilities for political pedagogy in the cultural sphere. Work in the didactic theatre is however essentially work on an aesthetic level, and on no account does it replace actual social or political praxis.

1. With the exception of the play *Die Horatier und die kurlatier* written in 1934. The other five are: *Der Ozeanflug* (The Ocean Flight), *Das Badener Lehrstueck vom Einverstaendnis*, *Der Jasager Der Neinsager*, *Die Massnahme* (Measures Taken), *Die Ausnahme und die Regel* (Exception and the Rule).
2. Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke* 15, *Theater* 1, p.239. (Collected Works in 20 volumes)
3. In an essay Brecht likens the theoreticians to the philosophers and the practitioners to politicians. He then emphasizes the need to overcome these rigid distinctions between theory and praxis and maintains: "In reality politicians should be philosophers and philosophers politicians." *Gesammelte Werke* 17, *Theater* 3, p. 1024.
4. Brecht coined the term 'positive collective', which can best be defined by the concepts of freedom of the individual and discipline of the entire mass. *Gesammelte Werke* 20, p.61.
5. Reiner Steinweg, *Das Lehrstueck*, Stuttgart 1972, p.38.
6. Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*.

Writers' Kitchen

An Interview with Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Translated from the Russian by Kalpana Sahni

G G Marquez I was once travelling to Geneva by train. It was a twelve hour journey. I had nothing to read except a copy of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which I was taking for some friends. And so I began to read my own novel. I could not get through the entire book, but read about three or four chapters.

Question Did you like it?

GGM Frankly speaking, no. While writing it I was certain that it was the best book in the world. But when I read it on my way to Geneva I felt very ashamed. I realized that I did not have enough time to write it properly. All I did was to retell it.

Q It is the best work from amongst your earlier writings.

GGM I personally feel that *No One Writes to the Colonel* is better. Perhaps I am wrong but when I was reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude* on that journey I felt it was evident that the author did not take enough time to write it. I had to finish the book by a specified date because I had to pay for the car and then there was the six months' house rent which was overdue. When I got down to the novel I estimated that six months would be enough to complete it. Instead, I wrote for eighteen months and at that time this seemed to me to be too long a period. With *Autumn of the Patriarch* it was completely different. I had seven years to finish the book so I could work in a relaxed manner. But the period during which *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was written was a difficult one and so I even went to the extent of removing the story of the life of two generations of the Buendia family. I am a very bad reader. As soon as I find something boring I throw the book aside. And the same thing happens when I write. The moment I feel that the

reader is beginning to get bored I immediately look for a way to enliven the book. And it was like that when I wrote *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. I felt that there were too many generations in it. That is the way it had been conceived for it was necessary to create a feeling of repetitiveness, of a cycle, but because of this it became boring. That's why in the middle of the book, in the part where Macondo is described after the war, I just decided to drop two generations. Later, when I read the book on the way to Geneva I felt that had I had the time I would have written everything carefully.

Q One Soviet critic noted that you considered *One Hundred Years of Solitude* just a prelude to *Autumn of the Patriarch*. But we have been reading and rereading this book and each time we find something new in it.

GGM I think after what you have said I should once again read *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. If you have found it so interesting perhaps it will be interesting for me to see what is so special in this book.

I am familiar with many critical works, people have written so much about the book that I have long since ceased to read their articles. In any case I am biased against critics. I prefer a direct contact between the writer and the reader. When I write I always hope that I am writing for the reader and the book will reach him directly, bypassing all intermediaries.

Some critics are inclined to tell the reader before he has read the book what the author wanted to say. And this means that the contact ceases to be direct. It is for this reason that I am against critics. I always feel that they are a barrier between the author and the reader. Sometimes I feel like saying, "Move aside. I want to speak to the readers and not to you."

I have noticed that at times they invent such things which have not even entered the head of either the writer or the reader. Maybe it is correct, perhaps there is a lot in the book that has been subconsciously arrived at. And the critic looks for this subconscious, the existence of which the author is unaware of. And that is why I do not take to heart what the critics say, or else I look at it as something inevitable.

As far as my saying that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was a prelude to *Autumn of the Patriarch*, this is something new. I do not remember ever having said it. However, I do think more or less on the

same lines. Not only *One Hundred Years of Solitude* but all my earlier writings were a prelude to *Autumn of the Patriarch*. The critics noted that the earlier writings were a prelude to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* but that *Autumn of the Patriarch* was something different. Whereas I feel it is just the opposite. My main interest has always been the problem of power. I feel that if Colonel Aureliano Buendia had not lost the war but won it he would have become a patriarch. His comrade, whom he is about to shoot, tells him: "If you win the war you will become the most bloody dictator the like of which the country has never seen." There is a moment when Buendia could have won the war, taken over power and become the bloodiest dictator. But then the book would have turned out to be something quite different. And that is why I left this twist for later on, for another book, for a book about a dictator. I left it for a book which I was preparing myself and which I had been wanting to write since long. It is in this sense, I think, that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a prelude to *Autumn of the Patriarch* but in that sense all else is also a prelude to it. In other words, the book that I was all along in search of and wanted to write was not *One Hundred Years of Solitude* but *Autumn of the Patriarch*. So, that's how it is. I began by saying what I have against the critics and end up agreeing with what they say.

And so, if Colonel Aureliano Buendia had won the war and become a dictator, everything would have been different. And then a book on a dictator requires a totally different approach. I'm afraid that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is perhaps liked by many because it is too light a book. And I'm also afraid that in most cases it is liked not because of what I find good in it but for those elements which I feel to be weak in the book. I feel that it somewhat resembles a novel that has been serialized for T.V.

But *Autumn of the Patriarch* on the other hand demands a certain literary grounding. It is for this very reason that I like it. I like it a lot because I worked on it at leisure and when I could not write, I stopped writing. And when I did not know what should follow I let it lie. For instance, I suddenly felt that I can't remember the smell of guavas. And if I could not recall the smell of guavas, I understood that I had lost touch with my past, with my roots, because I was writing the book in Barcelona.

I, a Latin American, found myself in a totally unique situation. I had no occasion to live through a dictatorship. In those days there was no suitable dictatorship for me to study in Latin America, to under-

stand what it was. And so I went to Spain where there was a real, old dictatorship of one man. The dictatorship of Somosa's family wasn't, in that sense, old. It had been handed down by tradition. I went to Spain. But it was very difficult to sit in Spain and write from memory about Latin America. Simultaneously, events were occurring there from day to day which enriched the novel.

This is a long digression but I will later come to the point that I want to make. In *Autumn of the Patriarch*, for instance, there was an episode where an attempt is made on the life of the dictator's wife. The episode had already been written. She takes off for the market with her son. At the last moment she is forced to take her husband's car because her's turns out to be out of order. But as things go, a bomb had been placed in his car. And so, when she arrives at the market, the dynamite explodes and the car blows up all over the market place.

Q Didn't some such thing happen with Carrero Blanco?

GGM The Carrero Blanco episode occurred after the novel had been completed. But I thought to myself that one couldn't leave it as it was for it would seem as if I had made use of an actual event. A writer can make use of a real episode but then he must do some literary re-shaping of it. But mine was turning out to be a mirror image, a news item. It was too much like a carbon copy of what had actually occurred. So I had to redo the episode. I think it turned out to be for the best because the story with the dogs that were dragged out to tear Letica Nazareno to pieces in the market is one of the finest episodes in the novel. And so, as a result of it, I got an episode that was much better than the original, both in the literary and in the humanist sense.

Spain filled the book with real and actual content. It gave a lot of material. But suddenly I noticed that the very base of the book, its essence, was getting blurred. Even the language changed because in my everyday life I was speaking a language different from the one I was writing. I allowed myself the luxury of putting the book aside, a luxury which I didn't have during the writing of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and went to the Caribbean islands. I went from island to island, travelling for two months. And when I returned everything was once again fresh and I could continue with my writing. These are the ideal conditions of work. It is also wonderful to be able to tear up and throw away a book written by you if you are not happy with it. But with that book, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, I did not have much of an opportunity.

Q Thank goodness you didn't have it! We have been trying to decipher *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for many years.

GGM In one interview I was asked what a novel is. I replied that any novel is a process of unravelling the world. And when I was asked what I meant by that I could not answer the question. Strange and unusual things occurred with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. When a publisher from Buenos Aires said that he wanted to bring out five thousand copies I got very alarmed. I wrote a letter which is still there, and in which I advised him to be cautious. I wrote that my other published books had a circulation of 700 to 1500. He, nevertheless, brought out 8000 copies in May, 1967. He calculated that by December he would be able to sell them all. But before this he decided to give the book to a journal. I think the name was *The First Plan*. Before its release in the market some copies of the book were given to critics, readers, reviewers, with the idea that these people, known for their publications in the journal, would introduce the novel. But when the issue was practically ready the six-day war in the Middle East broke out. The editors had to immediately change the cover and shift the contents of my book to the next issue. However, it was too late to take back the book from the book-shops. By the time the next issue of the journal came out, i.e., the following week, all the copies of the book had already been sold out. Not a single one remained of the eight thousand. Then it so happened that for the next three or four months the publisher neither had the paper nor the chance to reprint the novel, and it was impossible to procure even a single copy of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* from anywhere. So it was then really that a direct contact between the writer and the reader was established. But how this contact came about remains a total mystery to me. Because the publisher himself said that the book was mainly selling on the streets of Buenos Aires, at the entrances of the underground metros, etc., rather than in book-shops.

Since then ten thousand copies of the book have been reprinted every month. And now it is impossible to count how many copies have come out in Spanish – two or three million. And then a pirate edition of it has also been brought out. This, to tell you the truth, only makes me happy because in this case the only loser is the publisher. I, on the other hand, lose very little, because in any case the publisher keeps accounts with me according to his whim and fancy. And then, the pirate publisher reaches those whom others cannot reach. In this manner he fills the void and the chinks that have been left out by the legal publisher.

Q Does that mean that you have nothing against pirate publishers?

GGM I am told by my literary agent and publishers that a pirate publisher is harmful for me. But whatever one might say a pirate publisher will not publish a book that has no saleability. He takes no chances and neither can he allow any failure. Then he sells it a lot cheaper. In that way it is bought by those readers who would not be able to procure otherwise. I know of one case where ten Columbian students pooled in to buy one copy of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. I saw this copy. It was worn out, falling to pieces and covered all over with notes written by these ten. I presented each of them with a copy and took theirs in exchange. I still keep it.

Coming back to the book, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, I am most of all interested in the life of this book. In the history of literature there are an enormous number of works that make their appearance with a bang, but then they go into oblivion and nobody remembers them. And I ask myself: where are all those amazing novels of chivalry which were selling like hot cakes and being read over and over again. These were the *One Hundred Years of Solitude* of those times. No one knows of them . . . Well, I have been anxious about the effect time will have on my book. As far as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* goes, the importance for me is not its success, nor the enormous number of copies sold or that are continuing to sell, nor the number of languages into which it has been translated. It has been translated into more than thirty languages and now it is being translated into regional languages of the Soviet Union. For me it is important that the novel gets passed on from one generation to the next, so that the book which was read by the father should be liked by their children and their grand-children . I think this is what it means to "remain in literature".

However high might be the praise of the book by critics, however large might be its reading public, there still remains a natural and traditional phenomenon such as the reaction of children rebelling against the tastes of their parents. But there are, nevertheless, books which are read by the fathers, children and grand-children. That is important.

Q Each generation seeks in a book an echo of its ideas. Perhaps it is for this reason the critics exist?

GGM Unfortunately, I only know the view point of the critics and that of the enlightened readers. But the author never gets to know the

reactions of the ordinary reader. That is so, firstly, because the reader does not summon up courage to express it. It is also due to another awful factor -- the distance that is created by fame. Sometimes when my wife, Mercedes, and myself are alone at home in the evening we want to be invited out. We have masses of friends, but none of them invites us because they feel that on that particular evening we must be attending hundreds of formal banquets. So at times you find yourself in total isolation. That is a loneliness fame brings in its wake and it bears a striking resemblance to the loneliness which is brought about by power.

Q What about the readers' letters?

GGM The readers either ask for an autograph or else they are defending their diploma work or Ph.D. thesis based on my creative writings and want to ask questions. Or else, there are love letters. Mercedes has an enormous collection of such letters though, of course, she has not let me answer them. But mind you, she keeps them all.

What comes in the way of contact between the writer and the reader is unfortunately the latter's inhibition. It is true that a lot of readers did write and tell me that the story of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was their family's story. Agreed. It is not surprising to hear this from people living in the Carribbean or from those in Latin America, in short from a Latin. But one day I received a letter from a German woman living in some place in Germany in the mountains. I forget their name. And she said that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was the story of her family and Macondo is her village.

And this explains why I vehemently oppose a film being made on *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. I was always against it but in the meanwhile directors, especially from the USA, are trying their level best to do just that. They give me no peace and keep offering a higher and higher price. In the beginning, about twelve years ago, I was compelled to say that permission for a film version of the novel would cost a million dollars. The directors immediately beat a retreat. A little later they were ready to pay that million so we raised the amount to two million. But now they are already offering three. The real reason for my being against a film adaptation is that I want each person to have his own concept of the heroes of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. I would like it if one reader saw in Ursula his grandmother, whereas for another she might be like his sister. Each reader should create his own images while reading the book. Whereas on the screen, each character has a particular face. I might be wrong but I think that this can disappoint people. In

any case, I do not want to take the risk of such a disappointment to my readers. Let them continue to think that Ursula resembles their aunt rather than Sophia Loren, for instance. Let her not be so beautiful but then this is the real contact with the reader, just this . . .

Q Do you feel that the filming of the novel can bring about the destruction of an image?

GGM Yes, that's just it. It means the destruction of an image because the moment you are told in a film: "Look, this is what he looks like", you are invariably disappointed. By the way, when I told them that I would sell *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for three million which would help to bring about a revolution in Latin America, Ernesto Cardenal rang me up and said: "Sell the book. We are going to bring about this revolution". But they managed it even without my book. So it is still waiting for its hour, for another revolution . . .

Q Could you name at least three writers who have influenced you greatly as a reader and as a writer?

GGM I'm afraid I'll be unfair if I mentioned three or ten or even twenty writers because it is not always clear what is meant by literary influence. I will give a general answer because I really am interested in knowing what literary influence means and how it manifests itself.

Once, when I did not know how to continue *Autumn of the Patriarch*, I came across a book, *Hunting in Africa*, with a preface by Hemingway. The preface did not turn out to be that interesting, but once the book was in my hands I continued to read further about hunting and the behaviour of elephants. And, while reading about the behaviour of elephants, it suddenly dawned on me what my mistake had been and how I should write further. In other words, in the most unexpected manner I found the key to my hero's character and behaviour . . .

It is very difficult to trace all the influences. The critics, on the other hand, sometimes find the influence of books which the writer may never have read. But it would not be fair to say that the critics are totally mistaken because it might well happen that one writer has an influence on another, who has not read him, through a third writer.

There is, all the same, one writer who has had an enormous influence on me and that is Frenz Kafka. I had a great urge to write while

still at school but I wanted to go further than those writers whom I had read. Later, after joining the University, one night I chanced upon a collection of Kafka's short stories, *Metamorphosis*. I began to read and immediately a thought struck me: "If this can be termed literature then, yes, it is worth writing." I did not know that what was written there was possible, I thought it was forbidden, but now I know that I had something to tell people. The next day I began to write.

Kafka's influence is there in a series of short stories which have now been published. These were my first stories. I re-read them later and found them too intellectual. These stories are too rationalized and, in essence, have nothing in common with my life -- either then or now. I later returned to my village where I was born. I saw a different reality and realized that all the literary paraphernalia that I had at my disposal then, including the one borrowed from Kafka, was superfluous for what I actually wanted to write.

I wanted to write about my childhood experiences. I had returned to my village, Aracataca, to my house, to my mother. I had left it when I was eight years old and returned to it at the age of 20-22. I experienced one of the most stupefying experiences. I discovered that everything in the village, the people, the objects, were the same as before, only much older and smaller. The doors were much lower than I had imagined. The tables were the same but smaller. The streets which had earlier seemed to me broad were a lot narrower, the ceilings which had been so high were a lot lower and the huge bath houses and reservoirs were minute. The world around me, it turned out, had seemingly shrunk. It was as though someone had converted it into a small model of my reminiscences. This impression remained till I read William Faulkner. Later, when I thought about Faulkner's influence, I felt that in reality we had a lot in common.

I went to the south of the USA, to places that had been described by Faulkner, and I discovered that they bore an amazing resemblance to my village Aracataca. Their resemblance, you see, is due to a very simple fact. Aracataca had been constructed by the United Fruit Company, which had transposed the entire domestic culture from the south of the United States - its architecture, along with the zinc coated roofs, its railway wagons, the palms and pasture lands.

But all this I saw much later, i.e., after trying to find the ways and means of expression. I learnt from Faulkner because he was talking of a world which had so much in common with what I wanted to describe. So it would only be fair to recognize Faulkner's influence on me.

Then there was one more very strange influence. I'm absolutely certain of this influence, although not a single critic has discovered it, and that is the influence of Virginia Woolf. Virginia Woolf has a very original and exceptionally sharp sense of the world and all that there is in it. But primarily it is her sense of *time* that helped me a lot in my writing.

You must be surprised that of the three writers mentioned there is not a single one who writes in Spanish. However, there was another strong influence, in some ways the strongest. This was Spanish poetry of the Golden Age. In other words the Spanish language and poetry that I was educated on and which formed the basis of my writing, because this has its roots in the Spanish poetry of the Golden Age and the poetry of *Romancero*. In the days when I wanted to write but still did not know how and what, I used to read a lot of poetry. Poetry was my food. I am well acquainted with Spanish poetry and know a lot by heart. All this became useful in my work. The folk songs of Columbia's Atlantic coast and of the Caribbean islands had a certain influence. These songs have their own manner of narration. They do not describe, for descriptions do not fit in with music. Their songs, instead, rely on emotion. Of course, I came to all these conclusions much later. At that time I just felt that they express the world which I also wanted to express.

One other confession: the influence of the primitive Caribbean music on me. This was consciously incorporated in *Autumn of the Patriarch*. I can imagine the amount of difficulties that the translators must have had with *Autumn of the Patriarch*. The book abounds in Caribbean folk poetry. It has Cuban songs, songs from Mexico and one from Puerto Rico. All this, to tell you the truth, was included intentionally. It was a sort of literary game in which the author revelled. But the songs are interspersed throughout the book. Apart from that the book is full of Ruben Dario's poetry. The problem for all translators was that Ruben Dario is practically unknown outside the Spanish world, outside, in fact, Latin America. There is very little translation of his works into other languages.

Q The Russian reader is familiar with the poetry of Ruben Dario.

GGM Well then. I am glad for the Russian translators of the novel because *Autumn of the Patriarch* actually plays on Ruben Dario's language. This was done intentionally. I wondered who could serve as a typical poet in an era of the great dictators, dictators who ruled like the

feudals in the period of decay. **Ruben Dario**, undoubtedly, was one such great poet. This was not rationalized then as I am doing now. A book is not written mechanically. But, I think, I was right. Ruben Dario, the Nicaraguan poet, fitted in very well.

That is my brief and approximate answer to the question of influences. I could not very well say: so and so has influenced me - that would have been too narrow a reply. I think that all the books we read, all the people we come across, all events that take place, they all influence literature. They all serve as literary influences for the writer.

A literary character is not just one particular person, but a collage of many. And if someone took upon himself the task of reproducing a literal rendering of his appearance he would get a monster with the eyes of one person, the nose of someone else, a third person's character, a fourth one's hair - in short, a horrible monster. As far as my characters go, at least the ones I remember, I know who served as a basis for whom. At the same time each one of them has numerous traits of many many people. But at the base of all characters is primarily the author himself. It might be a female character or a male, positive or negative, it is the author, at least in my case, who serves as the base. The influence, as a result, is primarily that of the author. It is only after that the rest is added, as extraneous features. The writer's heart is in each of the characters, in the bad ones - the negative that is there in all of us, and in the good ones - all the good that there is in us. For this reason it is extremely difficult to be a Manichee in literature because in the morning you might be one person and by the evening some one else. I think the only sphere in which you must not digress is in politics. But in everything else one can do what one wants to and I have full respect for this. But a zig-zag in politics is another matter.

Q Which of the Russian writers do you like? What do you feel about Russian literature?

GGM Let us put it this way: whom did I get acquainted with first. Dostoevsky, of course, was the first. But if I was asked to make a choice from amongst the entire world literature, I would name the Russian writer - Tolstoy. I think that *War and Peace* is the greatest novel ever written in the history of mankind. What a marvel! I like practically all the Russian prose writers whom I have read. I read a lot of Dostoevsky although in very bad translation. Later on I read him in French. Those translations had been done by the Russians and were much better than the Spanish ones, which were a disgrace.

I think that the Russian novelists form the very basis for any writer . . .

Q Have you read Gogol?

GGM Yes, of course . . .

Q And Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*.

GGM I swear by my mother that I read this book after I had written *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. And I would like you to take me at my word.

Q But was it after or before *Autumn of the Patriarch*?

GGM Before. When *One Hundred Years of Solitude* came out in Italy the critics immediately began to draw parallels between it and *The Master and Margarita* which had just been published there. And at that time I read the book in Italian. It is a great book, just great. Now it has come out in Spanish. So then, I read it after *One Hundred Years of Solitude* but before *Autumn of the Patriarch*. That way I would like to save at least *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Q No one doubts that *Autumn of the Patriarch* has been based primarily on the Latin American dictators. Is it right to presume that many of the dictator's traits have been taken from Somosa?

GGM I always wanted to write a book on absolute power. I would, in fact, say that people visualize power as the highest state that they can attain, whether it is in the realm of an individual's work, or in his career. There is nothing above that. It is like a cork that goes upwards and upwards and finally reaches the surface of the water and can go no higher. That is the absolute limit and it is exactly like that of absolute power. I was always interested in such a character as the culmination point of my search as a writer.

I began writing *Autumn of the Patriarch* long back, even before *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, but it did not work out. Something was coming in the way. Now, come to think of it, what was lacking then was the experience of the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. But I had this book in mind for many years. I wanted to write the life of a dictator told in his own words at the time of his trial. This idea came to me when Sosa Blanco was being tried in Havana. I do not think

such a trial can be repeated. The Cuban Revolution would no longer attempt such a thing. But at that time they did it. This happened immediately after the Revolution when Peoples' Courts were established. It was necessary to bring about revolutionary justice. The Cuban Revolution was perhaps the only one of its kind where the people did not kill anyone or spill out into the streets taking law into their own hands. But war criminals existed and they had to be tried according to the verdict of the Peoples' Court. That was also necessary so that no one could point a finger and accuse Cuba of a blood bath. It was then that the Cuban Revolution decided to try the General of the Batista regime, Sosa Blanco, who had been burning the villages of a peaceful populace not involved in military operations. In short, he did just what Somosa's army had been doing. So it was decided to hold a public trial of this man in the presence of journalists from all over the world so as to enable everyone to see that it was a fair trial.

This was one of the most frightful spectacles I have ever witnessed. He was tried in the Palace of Sports. He, along with the Procurator, the accuser and the entire judicial body, was in the centre of the stadium. They were surrounded by tele-types of American newspapers and agencies which were in direct touch with the United States and were broadcasting everything that was taking place. People had packed the stands as they did during boxing matches. Drinks and eats, both fried and steamed, were being sold outside the stadium. Prostitutes, who still existed at the time, were going up and down offering themselves to any customer who happened to have strayed out, implying: "there is time enough to do what one wants to do and return, for this is going to go on all night." It was like a fair, a real outing . . .

The trial began at seven in the evening and ended at six in the morning and the accused was sentenced to death. All the bestial crimes of this man were proven beyond doubt because the survivors and the relatives of the dead had been assembled there. All night long they came, a whole parade of women in black passed before our eyes. It seemed as if everything had been well planned. But in actual fact there was no scenario. It was this that was so terrifying. Terrifying that such a thing could happen to a human being. That night had a stunning effect on me. I sat there without moving, without uttering a single word. When the death sentence was being read out I, along with the photographers, was standing opposite Blanco. Not a single muscle moved on his face. When the sentence was being read out he was standing. Only when the words "to death" were read out did his knees shake a little.

It was like a revelation for me . . . I thought: "Here is the book I am in search of, here is the dictator and he is being tried." But when I had calmed down and I began to analyse, I thought: no, this is impossible, because if the hero is going to speak in the first person so that we can get to know his viewpoint then I, as a writer, will get linked up with him through his language. I would be in a straitjacket, unable to use my language. I rejected this idea and began my search from another angle. My method of work was as follows: for many years, ten or twelve, perhaps, I read everything on Latin American dictators - evidence, letters, biographies, journalistic writings. And then, having read all that I could find, I tried to forget it all. On the basis of what I knew, I then wrote everything afresh and tried to refrain from taking up even a single real event. I used, so to speak, a collection of rules that formed the mechanism of dictatorship. In that way I conjured up everything in such a way as to avoid the emergence of a single real dictator but, rather, one who would resemble them all. Despite all that the base for the dictator's character became myself, the author.

Most of the traits for the actual character were taken from Juan Vicente Gomez. Very little was taken from the Somosa family, for it was only the older Somosa who was more or less that type of a dictator. It was this old Somosa who invented the cages with a grating in the middle. A beast of prey such as a tiger was placed in one half and in the other half a political prisoner. These cages were in his garden and people who came to visit him, saw them. But the dictatorship of Somosa's family was, nevertheless, dull. Whereas the personality of Juan Vicente Gomez was so fascinating that even the Venezuelans could not resist the temptation of rehabilitating him as a great Venezuelan. In other words, without forgetting his bestiality, his cruelty and all that he had done, they still try and remember what was national in his character. Because he, of course, stood out for his intuitive intelligence and amazing folk wisdom. So, from all that I had read it was Juan Vicente Gomez who intrigued me the most and my character comes closest to him.

Q What about Truchilo?

GGM Yes, a lot has also been taken from Truchilo.

Q And Franco?

GGM No, much more from Spain itself rather than from Franco, i.e., the conditions of the country at that time. Franco himself had very

little of Spain in him. Once I even wanted to seek permission for an audience with him to be able to see him at close quarters. I think I could have managed the permission, but what reason could I have given for wanting to meet Franco? I could not turn around and tell him: "You know, I am writing a book about a son of a bitch and I would like to . . ."

Q The way he died seemed to be so much like something that had been conjured up by the imagination of an artist. His death itself smelled of literature.

GGM Yes, but this is what happened. My book was practically finished. All that was left was the finale. I was waiting for Franco's death to see what his death would look like. But he was just refusing to die. This wait dragged on for so long that I left everything as it was and published the book. But not even a year passed before Franco began to die and his finale turned out to be much more powerful than the finale of my book. He outdid literary imagination in every way.

Q Was it a coincidence that three books dealing with dictators were published simultaneously by three different Latin American writers?

GGM Yes and no. It was not a coincidence in the sense that dictatorship is a regular theme in Latin American literature. I think every Latin American writer, sooner or later, succumbs to the temptation of reverting to the theme of the dictator. That's what I feel and I hope that these three books won't come in the way of future writers in developing this theme. To my mind the dictator is the only rounded typological character that Latin America has been able to offer. Some countries could offer a seeker of adventures, others a mystic, but in Columbia, in Latin America, the only character that our history has actually contributed is that of the dictator, the feudal dictator primarily, and not the contemporary type . . . The contemporary dictators are technocrats, like products, composed of readymade parts. They somewhat resemble the calculators whereas the former sought the support of the masses for they reflected their beliefs. The masses idealized and deified the dictator. And then the masses suffered less directly from the dictator's persecution than the politicized ones - the students, the politicians and the representatives of various parties. The commoners primarily perceived the magic which the dictator possessed. This was not surprising for the people, unlike now, were illiterate. Truchilo's funeral turned out to be an apotheosis. He was turned into a God. But time passes and everything changes . . .

The theme of the dictator is enticing for any Latin American writer. So much has been written on it that I am scared the writers who come after us might not want to go near it. They might avoid it . . .

Q It is better if dictators disappear . . .

GGM But they existed and books are written about that which happened. One would like to hope that there won't be any more dictators. But unfortunately it does not depend on us, the writers. We can't do anything that will rid us of dictators. Perhaps someone can, but not a writer and that too on his own, alone.

That's why I say that the appearance of three books was not a coincidence . . . Very few people are aware that some years back, towards the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies Carlos Fuentes wanted to write a book *The Fathers of the Motherland*. Each wellknown writer of the time was going to write a book about the dictator of his country. As far as I remember Miguel Otero Silva was going to write on Juan Vicente Gomez. Julio Cortazar wanted to write on the corpse of Evita Peron, Carlos Fuentes on Santa Ana, Alejo Carpentier on Machado, Juan Boshch on Truchilo, Roa Bastos on Doctor Francia . . . And I was left without "my" dictator. However, I was already working on one such book. I told Fuentes that he had played a dirty trick on me because he knew I was writing a book on a dictator. Although work on it was not really progressing I had explained the idea a couple of times in the press. Fuentes' plans did not materialize but Alejo continued to work. I don't know how his initial idea would have worked out for he had originally planned to write Machado's biography. But something totally different emerged – *The Resources of the Method*. Roa Bastos was the most diligent because he is a real book-worm and an astounding researcher. He wrote a solid piece, where each episode from Doctor Francia's life was thoroughly researched. This Francia literally bolted the country with a lock. He locked the country and left just one window through which the post came in. It was unbelievable. And so, three books have been written but all three stemmed from that initial idea.

Q We follow all your statements about what you are going to publish and write with great interest . . . In one interview to a newspaper you said that each contemporary dictatorship in Latin America lasts seven to ten years. And that is about the same length of time that you spend on a novel. Can we assume, then, that you will have a new novel ready at the time of Pinochet's fall? Or perhaps you are not writing a novel these days as you mentioned once?

GGM In actual fact it is really very difficult to write under the constant pressure of the question "what are you writing nowadays"? And so, I think up all sorts of answers to get out of a situation. This helps me. But I forget what I said yesterday and do not think in advance what I will say tomorrow. But it turns out that I have friends who note down whatever I say and then make comparisons. Finally something like an abracadabra emerges. But all the same, a grain of truth is always there.

I think it was very important in those days that I was able once again to go back to political work. That included my work as a writer. The Chilean coup pushed me into this . . .

On the day *Autumn of the Patriarch* was released the journalists did not ask me a single thing about the book. They only asked me what the next one would be about. It was a totally wrong moment for such a conversation. I did not have a theme for a novel, nor the inclination to immediately sit down to work. That book drained me of too much energy. *Autumn of the Patriarch* was not just written word by word but letter by letter. The work on it was very difficult. I would consider my day fruitful if I managed, after all the corrections and changes, to write out four or five sentences. But time passed. I rested and began to go through my papers. I found something that related to very old times. If you are not tired I'll tell you about it. The notes were on my first visit to Rome and what happened there. This was in 1955.

Since I was there for the first time I did not know the town at all nor did I know which hotel to go to. The station porter told me that he knew a good hotel on via Nacional. The Italians have their own peculiar system. For instance, in a six storied building there might be five different hotels. On each floor there is a separate hotel. The lift on each floor stops in front of the administrator's desk of the hotel which is located on that floor. And so the porter brought me to one such hotel. He might have had an arrangement to bring his clients there. When the door of the lift opened I saw about 15 or 20 tourists sitting in a line perhaps waiting for dinner. It was the height of summer. They were in shorts and the only thing I noticed were their pink knees. Perhaps they were Englishmen. I don't know why but on seeing them I got scared. I told the porter: "No, let's go to the next floor." We went up. I got a room, took a shower, had dinner, went for a walk along the street. The next day I went to the Columbian Consul. He asked me where I was staying and I replied: "In building No. 23 on Via Nacional." "That's impossible. There is a hotel in that building where 17 Englishmen were

poisoned last night." I exclaimed: "What?" He opened the newspaper and showed me: "Look." 17 Englishmen who were staying in a hotel on such and such floor - the same I'd seen on the eve - ate oysters for dinner. The oysters were not fresh and the Englishmen suffered from food-poisoning. In other words, had I stayed there, I too . . . I wrote down this incident.

And later, while I was travelling around Europe I made notes and continue to do so up to now. So while going through my papers I discovered that I had material for about 100-120 stories dealing with what happened to a Latin American in Europe. The main idea in these would have been the collision of two cultures which is always interesting, so long as it does not crawl into the foreground and become a concept. Because in all my works my starting point is always the image, never the concept. In this story, likewise, the idea originated with the image of the 17 Englishmen sitting in the hotel and their knees . . .

And so, I put all my notes in order, notes which I had kept for 20 years in a school exercise-book. I discovered that a good book of a hundred stories could materialize. I began writing the first one, "The Seventeen Poisoned Englishmen". I transformed the hero into a village woman from one of our villages. The woman had become a widow and her children ask her: "What is it you want to do that will bring you solace?" and she replies that she wants to go to Rome to see the Pope. Her children put her on a ship and send her off to Rome. There she encounters what I've already told you about.

Taking this story as the base I began to wonder what I could do with the rest of the episodes each of which had seemed to me an independent story. Now it all turned out to be pure fantasy. I realized this when after a proper check up I discovered there was not all that much material. I shortened some parts and decided that I might get 30 to 40 stories and that would suffice. Each story would be about 50 pages long. The rest of the material could be incorporated into these stories. I pulled out the note-book, which had travelled all over the world with me, began tearing out the extra sheets and cleared the table for work. But the next day when I looked for the note-book I couldn't find it. Perhaps I threw it along with the papers. This was a catastrophe. In the beginning I still tried to look for it in a systematic manner near the places where it had been lying, inch by inch, on the floor, behind the tables and chairs, everywhere that I could have taken it or where it could have fallen. But when, after two days, I got convinced that the note-book had really ceased to exist I was left with only one option - try and remember the notes.

I managed to remember twenty-six stories and I feel that I recalled those very ones which were worth writing about. I tried to recall the rest but could not remember any worthwhile one. So I began to work on them and out of the twenty-six twelve stories have been written.

And I really hope that Pinochet does not last longer than the twenty-sixth story. If Pinochet goes tomorrow I will give the book to the publishers the very next day and I will have as many stories as I have managed to complete by then.

Q What do you believe in, magical realism or in the magic of literature?

GGM I believe in the magic of real life. I think that Carpentier's concept of "magical realism" refers to the wonder of the Latin American reality or, more specifically, the reality of the Caribbean countries. It is magical. The things that happen there . . . of course, this is also due to the African and Arab influence. Much of it can be explained in this way but there are people in the Caribbean, for instance, who have the gift of foresight. Why go so far for examples: the strangest things happened to my mother. That in itself was magical realism. Our education, however, was on the lines of Descartes, and with this knowledge we stepped into life. But such an education was insufficient because the moment we come across something out of the ordinary we simply shrug it off by saying that this cannot be. And that is why I think that the only thing a writer claiming to be a member of the "mafia" of magical realism can do is to simply believe in reality without attempting to explain it. Let the critics, scientists, sociologists or whosoever, find explanations . . .

I want to tell you a story and it is just as well that I am going to tell it in a socialist country, in a country of materialists. I saw a man who could cure cows suffering from worms in their ears. He said that he cured them with a single prayer, without touching them. He would stand at a certain distance from the cow and start saying his prayer. And the worms, already dead, would fall out of the ears which would be quite cleaned out. I know this for a fact. In fact there was no need for him to even go anywhere. Even if people come to his house and told him about the ailing cow he would rid it of the worms. Had I not seen this with my own eyes I would not have told you. I am telling you this word for word, as it happened. This is a problem for the scientists, whereas I think that it is "magical realism".

But there is something else. It is very difficult to invent an episode because everything has a limit and the writer's arbitrariness also has its own laws. Even when one decides to cross the framework of the accepted norms one has to abide by a different set of rules. One cannot totally transgress them. Because the moment one does something that violates them one ceases to believe in what one has written. And if the reader also stops believing then the entire literary work goes up in smoke . . .

How lovely it is to be talking of literature today. I have not been given the opportunity to talk of it for so many years.

Q We had a lot of discussions in our circles about the finale of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. What did you want to express through the universal flood?

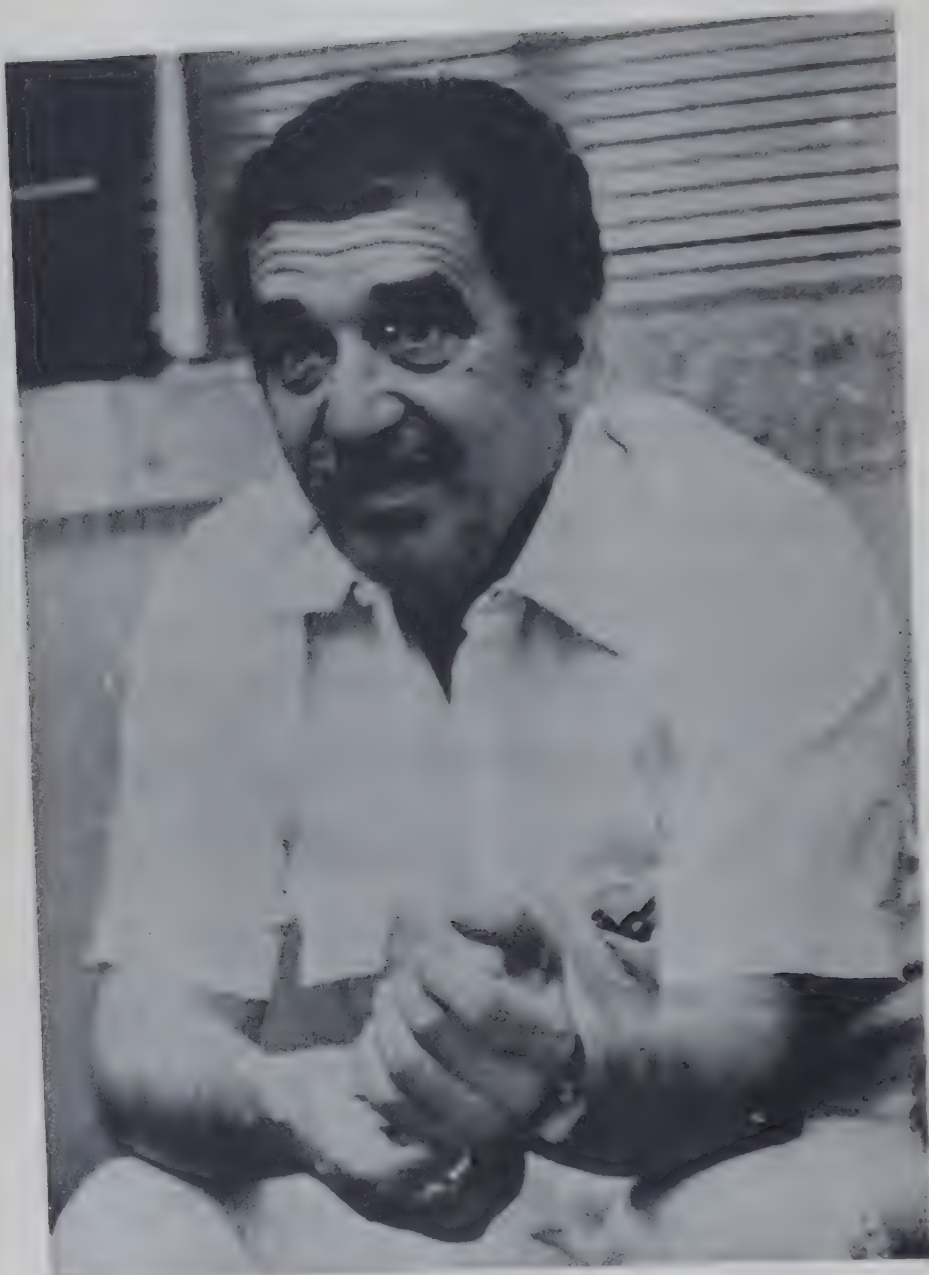
GGM When I reached the finale of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* I did not know how to end it. I just went on dragging it. The moment I realized that I had reached the finale I felt I must write something to lift the book, because were I to complete it in the usual manner the book would collapse. Something was required to lift it. At first I thought as follows: when the last Buendia discovers that a son with a pig's tail has been born to him and this child dies soon after, he locks himself in the house and remains there to die. The finale turned out to be weak, not saying anything. Although it ended with a full stop everything remained in the air. This was a bad finale for a book which severely criticized a particular historical reality, the characters and the world which was described in it. In other words, this was not a finale.

Now, until the last moment, I did not know what Melquiades wrote or what was there in his parchments. I left it hanging and when my Melquiades wrote I used to think: "When will I decipher what he is writing?" and would reply to myself "whatever I might say about his writing it'll be weaker, worse than the secret itself. Whatever explanation I might give will be worse than the realization that it will never be known what exactly was written there." But when I reached the finale and reread the entire book I once again asked myself this question: "Well, what could Melquiades have written?" And I remember, I woke up once in the middle of the night: "Ah!, I know what Melquiades is writing! Melquiades is writing the book which I, at present, am writing. And he, of course, knows that Macondo will be erased from the face of this earth by the wind." This was there in the book, *An Evil Hour*, written in 1955, ten years earlier. But if I finished it in that way I would

have to decipher the language in which the notes were written. Once I decided to decipher the text it became clear that the notes had to be written in Sanskrit, because Melquiades was a gypsy. Such is the writer's kitchen, which the reader does not get a chance to see. But because today we have broached this subject I can say that these are the real confessions of a writer . . . And so, I did not know how to finish the book. But now I quite like the finale and cannot imagine ending it in any other way. The book is now compact, there is no way out, there is a lock on the book.

I guess it is time to say good-bye. It was a very enjoyable meeting. Some of what I said here I've mentioned earlier, but most of it was expressed for the first time. For me it was a real relaxation to chat and recall things which one does not get a chance to do. One is forever busy. In fact it was like an old man reminiscing. Imagine discovering suddenly that you're talking like a grandfather.

ERRATUM: We are sorry for the error in the title of Fernand Leger's painting on p.76 of our issue dated October-December 1982. The correct title is 'The Three Musicians' (1944).



'Such is the writer's kitchen, which the reader does not get a chance to see.'

The Latin American Novel and Marquez

S.P. Ganguly

"Every Latin American writer goes around dragging a heavy body, the body of his people, of his past, of his national history." PABLO NERUDA

THE DOCUMENTAL and naturalist character of the hispano-american novel in the first hundred years of its existence conformed to the actual conditions of life in the continent where human identity is subject to devouring nature. This tyrannical role was assumed by the native oligarchies and military adventurers in the 19th century post-independence period who, thanks to vastly improved techniques, converted human and natural exploitation into a "second conquest". The Latin American repertory of writings of the period, especially novels, form the chronicle of this melodrama that comes well into the twentieth century. But in the intervening period ambiguous processes occur.

There develops the hispano-american *baroque* style which, as Lezama Lima suggests, allows a process of synthesis and of fulfilment. It becomes "the art of counter conquest". It employs the techniques of literary expansion and in the space it thus creates, it incorporates the density of American reality. Although the voluntarist liberalism and the republican rhetorics in the writings were far removed from the historical circumstance as such (consider the dichotomy between the notion of the state and the looseness of the then Latin American nations), and although they tended to legitimize the ideology of the new dominating class, these writings succeeded in transferring the creeping reality of the region to the denseness of the language, thus creating a new and critical genre.

If the 'cronicas' of Inca Garcilaso was a guide to the meso-american social practices, the repertory of the later mestizos reformulates and takes off from these chronicles, transcending their historicist nature, and seeking to expand the cultural model. The structure of its cultural discourse is a window to the knowledge about the American conscious-

ness. Julio Ortega points out¹ that there is a parallel in the writings of modern writers like Neruda, Paz, Carpentier, Lezama Lima, Arguedas, Rulfo, Cortazar, Garcia Marquez, Fuentes.

The traditional novel in Latin America, marked by the populist sentiment, saw the writer in the role of the intellectual liberator who would denounce all that was immoral and unjust. In addition, the feudal background and Latin America's economic role provided epical situations that the novels were prompt in registering. However, the advent of modern capitalism not only affected the semi-feudal structures and their operational role vis-a-vis the internationalization of commerce and capital but also made the society so much more complex. As Fuentes points out, the traditional novel appeared to be a "static form within a static society" in spite of its yearning for change; it reflected the immediate reality in a documental sense, the moral basis and epical simplicism of which derived from a clear-cut distinction between the good and the bad. Thus the Latin American novels introduce their line-up of heroes and villains only to be replaced by the 'caudillos' in the era after the Mexican Revolution. However the shift of emphasis to the people (personalized in a regional gaucho or chieftain) and the dynamism in the movement of destiny under the complex social processes are reflected thus: in transcending the fiction of romantic populism to a state where "heroic certainty is converted into a critical ambiguity, natural fatality into contradictory action, romantic idealism into ironic dialectic."²

As the element of imagination begins to exert itself the preoccupation with immediate reality gives way to a new space, and to a search for the profound American essence. Novels begin to recognize that man in the Latin American continent is located at the anguished juncture of an undefined future, and that to understand his predicament it is essential to dive to the roots reaching back to the 16th century. In other words, the visible reality has to be complemented by an imaginative reality, the invisible mechanism of which has to be perceived precisely in order to grapple with the present essence. There begins the new path of the modern Latin American novel.

The critical attitude in the observation of reality as a revindication of the American conscience -- and consciousness -- started appearing in the writings of the twenties and thirties which were still in the tradition of naturalism and realism (of Balzac, Zola and Dickens.) However, a further upsurge of this critical attitude came up from two directions. In 1955 the Mexican novelist Juan Rulfo used universal myths in his treatment of situations, types and language of rural Mexico in his novel *Pedro*

Paramo. Other dimensions had already been created by Jorge Luis Borges in his *Ficciones* (1944), and by Alejo Carpentier in *Los Reinos de Este Mundo* (1949). Together they set up a new narrative kindling the mythic and metaphysical imagination, allowing a probe into the ambiguities present in the continental man.

In the nineteenth century, given the local nature of the struggle for independence, the Latin American novel operated within a closed circuit. For instance, neither the Paris-Commune nor other external events (like the Franco-Prussian war) had a bearing on the living experience of the writer or people in general. On the other hand, the post-First World War scene was different. The economic order began to get internationalized and increased intra-national interaction. The Spanish Philosopher, Ortega Y Gasset, whose idea of self-assessment of Spanish society served as an influential model for Latin Americans, laid the basis for the task of self-appraisal.

After the Spanish Civil War many exiled Spanish intellectuals came over to Latin America with fresh ideas. Personal observation and interpretation of reality began replacing preconceived patterns. The European literary movements that succeed one another with such velocity touched the Latin American artist's sensibility. Joyce and Faulkner immediately incorporated as part of the universal experience of writers. The activity of writing now involved elements of a game, and the writer tried to create new possibilities which transcend the visible yet define the future on the ground of reality. At the basis of this resurgence lay his deep concern for stylistic inventiveness, which may encompass social contradictions coming in the wake of the technological revolution and the rise of the city centres which relegate the rural landscape to the periphery.

In novels the accent on personal interpretations reflected in the narrative mode of different authors, specifically, in the search for the relationship between fantasy and reality where myth, epic (real deeds) and utopia are interplayed to form the image of reality. In the shaping of this image the lineal determinism of time is broken by a circular concept revealing the simultaneous spaces of reality -- the past and present running together. Only a language that can sustain the tension between nostalgia and hope is capable of inventing this image. Here then is a new kind of baroque that revolves round the impulse of emancipation through language. But most novelists attempted this with their own specificities and it would be incorrect to characterize them as having what Jose Marti called an apparent "air of family" in the sense in which this was true for the novelists of the earlier generation.

Individual specificity in the treatment of themes was complemented by an outburst of camaraderie between writers from various quarters of Latin America. The Cuban Revolution became a meeting place that helped in creating a sense of community and mutual responsibility. This was also the time when Latin American writers came to be projected in the outside world. Apart from intensifying the aspect of intertextuality so characteristic of the modern narrative of this continent, their kinship is discernible in the vision of totality common to them. Garcia Marquez has said that they are all writing one novel in Latin America and this is constituted of chapters from different novelists belonging to different countries in the continent.³ The intertextuality is so noteworthy that characters of one novel are clearly recognizable as appearing in others.

Among the contemporary writers who have received the maximum readership since the sixties and seventies, the most outstanding are Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, Juan Rulfo, Julio Cortazar, Lezama Lima, Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa. Although this in no way exhausts the list, they do establish the literary paradigm of the cultural consciousness specific to Latin America. Today the novelists are more encyclopaedic and universal than ever, and in consonance with the state of civilization, they are better equipped to detect and establish relations, beyond the given time and space, between analogous realities. This is what defines their modern cultural vision. It manifests a sort of an associative reflex characteristic of a philosopher in that he looks for the combining power of two seemingly dissimilar events (or objects) either in their essence or in their compositional mechanism. Whether it is the perception of the baroque of the continent's reality, the "real maravilloso" of Carpentier, or the "realismo magico" of Marquez, perceiving a second or parallel reality (occult and yet true), there is a profound quest for unfolding the layers of a totalized reality. In this task the power of exegesis of myth, its narrative language and structure, play the most important role. At the same time, the presentation of the image through the prism of myth takes the narrative close to poetry. Thus even in the language of the narrative, poetry seems to be the true motor.

As Ramon Xiran has said,⁴ myth has the power to take us beyond the sayable limits of words, beyond the borders of silence. The image founded on it breaks into other realities beyond the visible. Its language therefore aims at capturing a magical reality. It is magical in the sense that Levi-Strauss defines magic: "naturalization of human actions" whose discovery the literary creations register. It should be added that the discovery of this novelesque reality has given the genre a renewed

lease of life. (The bourgeois form of the novel, and its terms of reference, realism, had by now entered into a definite crisis, the method of observing individuals in personal and social relations, which realism practices, having passed into the realms of sociology in the developed countries.)

Fuentes suggests that the novelesque realism is not any more stamped with the dichotomy of capitalism-socialism but on the other hand "expresses itself in its capacity to find and build on a language the myths and prophecies of an epoch...feeding on a sum of deeds that are cold, marvellous, contradictory, ineluctable, liberating and alienating once again, transforming life in the industrial societies - automation, electronics, atomic energy, etc. Just as the traditional economic formulas of industrialism cannot solve the problems of the technological revolution, bourgeois realism (or industrial realism for that matter) can't pose the questions and the limiting answers of modern man."⁵ The new realism therefore rises from a kind of restlessness, from an authentic rebellion against a reality - the structure and rigidity of its logic -- it wants to transform. Correspondingly, it conceives of creation as a reality in itself with its own laws and notions of time, space and movement.

Before we go on to observe the textual operation of the "other reality" in the work of a specific novelist from Latin America, one more observation is in order. In its evolution as a generative form, expressing itself within a wider cultural discourse, the Latin American novel does not only make the traditional formats redundant, it functions as a "novelization of the very genre."⁶ Its intertextuality is not only based on a fusion of various genres but also on its affinity to other disciplines such as history, politics, or the social sciences guided by the critical use of imagination. A "deconstruction" of a set formalization based on the composite power of various repertoires puts to question the very sense of the traditional novel form. Two characteristic examples would be Cortazar's *Rayuela* and Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*. Similarly the decodification of the natural order in Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo* and Garcia Marquez's *Cien Anos de Soledad* proves the same point. Wrapped in syntactic puns, metaphors and modisms specific to Latin American usage, the narrative has an elliptical form and a plasticity specific to the hispanic imagination.

The Latin American novel now exercises a determining influence on the European novel. Amongst the novelists of such international stature there is Gabriel Garcia Marquez of Colombia, the recipient of the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature.

In various interviews Garcia Marquez has held that there is not a single line in all his work that does not have a basis in reality. At the same time he is conscious that the concrete reality of the Caribbean "resembles the wildest imagination". The constant interplay of these two elements broadly define the work of the author. He has been a professional journalist for a long time and acquired a gradual militancy over the years. In the style of Neruda he does not believe in "inventing" his songs; he works on information, like a journalist. But while his manner of recounting reality upholds literature's relationship with life, he introduces the supernatural and the fantastic, memories and strange experiences with the same naturalness.

Marquez's most acclaimed work is *Cien Anos de Soledad* (Hundred Years of Solitude). The big leap to this work covers a whole series of novels where the reality of the country figures repeatedly. These works show the process of decomposition of the upper classes, the plague of political violence, and they convert in mythic forms the traditional themes of the hinterland. One could say that the author, beginning his writing career with the tortured Faulknerian monologues in *Leaf Storm* (1955), reached a climax in 1967 with the appearance of his *Hundred Years of Solitude*. Here he made immortal the South American Yocknapatawpha – the foundation of the utopic Arcadia – Macondo, where the terrifying saga of the Buendia family unfolds. Through the geneological tale of his fantasy personage, Aureliano Buendia, Garcia Marquez dreams the history of Macondo-Colombia-Latin America.

The novel is a vast tragic allegory; it depicts the history of a family passing cyclically from innocence to destruction in a mythic place, Macondo, accompanied by an assortment of epic deeds of war, exploitation, plagues and corruption. This saga of the individual Buendia transforming into the next Buendia and filling the vacuum of solitude of a hundred years changes with the same rhythm as the American continent. At the end we read that the last of the Buendias discovers that the totality of the novel had already been written by Melquiades, one of the gypsies who figures much earlier in the thoughts of the first of the Buendias. The magical element predominates in the novel, "a magic made of earth and dream which is at the same time myth and legend rather than history."⁷

The novel represents creation as a bewitching autogeny and therefore a myth. Macondo can be defined only if its totalizing history is recounted – its "real" as well as "fictional" history, the "officially documented" as well as the "desired-imagined-dreamed" history. "The saga

of Buendia and Macondo includes the totality of the past – oral, legendary and official.”⁸ A Spanish galleon is found sunk in the mountain, people tattoo their virile parts, farmers murdered by a banana company are thrown into the sea flowers shower from the sky, the sky where Remedios, the Beauty, ascends. As Carlos Fuentes has pointed out, in each of such acts of fiction, “the positivist time of the epic (this really happened) and the nostalgic time of utopia (this could happen) both die out and what emerges is the absolute present of the myth: this is happening.”⁹

The journalistic technique of adding details in an incident makes the work of the novelist more credible. This principle which Marquez learnt from his grandmother is literally followed in the descriptions. His language is heterogenous, hyperbolic and full of humour. He insists on borrowing phrases, sentences, characters and contexts from other Latin American writers -- a kind of intertextuality to enliven the ‘Hundred Years of Community’ that dialectically moves him to create his novel *Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Hundred Years of Solitude is representative of Garcia Marquez’s narrative art at its finest, an art that comprehends the Latin American horizon and reveals a sharp perception of the direct and deliberate confrontation with the extra-literary reality of the countries of the continent. Marquez represents the vast band of writers who, in the words of Julio Cortazar, increasingly conceive of creation as an “aesthetic method of exploring the Latin American reality by an intuitive and constructive search for our own roots and profound identity.”¹⁰

- 1 Julio Ortega, “La Escritura Americana”, in *ECO* (Bogota, Dec. 1977).
- 2 Carlos Fuentes, *La Nueva Novela Hispano-Americana* (Mexico, 1980) 6th edition, p. 15.
- 3 Garcia Marquez, Interview in *Paris Review*.
- 4 Ramon Xiran, “Crisis del Realisms” in *America Latina en su Literatura* (Mexico, siglo XXI edito 1980), 7th edition, p.202.
- 5 Fuentes, op. cit., p.18.
- 6 Julio Ortega, op. cit., No.2.
- 7 Ramon Xiran, op. cit., p.199.
- 8 Carlos Fuentes, op. cit., No.3, p.62.
- 9 Ibid, p.64.
- 10 Julio Cortazar, *Realidad Y Literatura* (Casa Latinoamericana Xalapa) suplemento 1, p. 1, mimeo.



Guru Dutt in *Pyasa*



Meena Kumari in *Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam*

In the Realm of Shadows

Arun Khopkar

THE CHANGES that the 16th century brought about in the depiction of Man in European literature culminated in the birth of the novel, which continues to be the most important literary form to this day. Man had become his body, his actions, his gestures, his conversation, his inner life and his environment. At all times, from the very beginning of realism, there has been a constant need to preserve a balance between detail and signification. To prevent an accumulation of detail from overwhelming and destroying the sense, and the form of realistic works, several conventions were created.

The first convention is character. Born out of the author's special interest, a character is full of contradictions, lives on many levels and is always viewed by the author with interest, though this is not necessarily sympathetic. The character, once conceived, is often left to grow by itself, freed from the rigidity of the original idea.

Often, no external detail of the character is given. This happens in Dostoevsky. Yet such characters have a tremendous density. A successful character is the result of a careful weaving of significant detail into an interesting pattern.

When a character, through a powerful and significant form, touches the mores of the time, when at the same time it creates images out of the experiences which society is yet to understand and is still able to rise above social reality, it acquires the power of myth. Don Quixote, Nana, Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary are characters of this order.

The second convention is the type. A type is made up of the common traits of many characters. The author has little interest in the inner

life of such a person; it is a quick sketch done with the help of convention and cliché. This is not to say that the author has no sympathy for him. Such a person might even suggest nobility. Nevertheless he is and remains a type.

The third convention is caricature. The major difference between type and caricature is the lack of sympathy in the author for the latter. Caricature makes exaggerated use of the ridiculous traits of a person. Subjects which have always been caricatured in art can be transformed into characters only when the author has a compassion for human kind. Bunuel's dwarves and Genet's homosexuals and thieves have been other authors' caricatures. Bunuel and Genet turn them into characters.

All the three conventions we have looked at are based on the idea of integrated personality. Those artists who do not work for this basic assumption of character must be judged by criteria other than those of realism.

* * * * *

In Indian cinema, the woman is generally a caricature. When a woman smokes and is influenced by Western ways, then she is the moll, the vamp, the spoilt rich girl. The only other kind of woman is the ideal mother, wife or sister. But Chhoti Bahu in *Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam* is the creation of an artist who has a deep compassion.

Who or what is Chhoti Bahu?

She is proud and falls at her husband's feet. She is chaste and becomes her husband's prostitute. With no help but liquor at the end, she is pure as driven snow. She is faithful to her husband and she is Bhootnath's beloved. She is an ascetic who drenches herself in every kind of sensuous pleasure. Voluptuous, marble-skinned, ebony-haired, dressed in gold and silver, she has unfathomable eyes, and a voice that arouses every pore in the skin. She is limpid but also a skeleton, surreptitiously hidden away underground. She is the life force irresistibly drawn to its own death.

Amongst the innumerable cardboard women in Indian art, idolized as goddesses or exploited as objects, enshrined or raped, Chhoti Bahu stands out, a vibrant, living combination of contradictions, exposing the hypocrisy that lies at the root of the creation of all other women. And in the feudal ethos in which she lived, such contradictions become tragic.

In none of Guru Dutt's other tragic-melodramatic works does the conflict between historic circumstance and personal compulsions emerge as powerfully as it does in this film.

The society that set up the husband as a god chained the wife to external service. The land continued to serve him profitably as it had done for centuries. Thus, oblivious to all else in the heady pleasures of liquor, dance, music and women - a classy prostitute was a sign of manhood - the men of the Chowdhury clan never suspected that if they weren't vigilant the land would one day dry up.

And the wives wandered in the dark interior of the *haveli*, breaking and making ornaments and dressing themselves in rich silks.

Chhoti Bahu's pride will not let her suffer such humiliating neglect. She flings herself on her husband's feet begging him not to go away. So the contradictions grow till at last, while on her way to a holy man with Bhootnath to find a cure for her dying husband, her brother-in-law sets murderers upon her to kill her. Her crime is infidelity.

Guru Dutt uses every cinematic element with skill and understanding to underline the contradictions inherent in this character.

When Bhootnath sees Chhoti Bahu for the first time, his shy eyes will not rise above her feet. When they are pulled irresistably upwards, and the camera travels with them, Chhoti Bahu seems to come down upon the earth like a goddess. Her speech has a pace which gives it the quality of poetry and music.

Her chamber is dimly lit. In that semi-darkness her ornaments and goldencrusted saris glitter. Tiny points of light tremble on the cascade of her long dark hair.

Every shade on the palette from dark despair to iridescent sensuousness colours her songs. Her gestures are neither realistically casual nor falsely dramatic. They are choreographed to a certain rhythm. All this brings to every high point in her portrayal an intense significance that is rarely found in melodrama.

There are overtones of rape in the scene where she drinks or is forced to drink for the first time.

Eisenstein has shown how great directors often use a solution opposite to that which was expected. After the rape, Chhoti Bahu does not cry. She laughs uncontrollably. Into her laughter mingles that of Ghadibabu. Ghadibabu is the chorus for the tragedy of the *haveli*. The images that portray the decay of the *haveli* are as powerful as those that

portray Chhoti Bahu. That is why the tragedy reaches out beyond the confines of romantic, personal tragedy. The tragedy of Chhoti Bahu, the individual, appears at the centre of the immense canvas that captures the decay of an entire era. And this is not merely a backdrop; other important events are taking place elsewhere on it.

Guru Dutt, always attracted by self-destruction, watches this tragedy unfold through Bhootnath's spellbound eyes. But he is not at the centre of the tragedy. He, therefore, sees it in some perspective, though not without involvement. He accepts Jaba's hand which helps out of the whirlpool of despair.

Guru Dutt often brings together clashing images or brings to the surface the contradictions latent in an image. It is necessary, therefore to understand these image pairs. Unless we do this, we are likely to think of the Jaba-Bhootnath relationship as a lighthearted subplot.

Chhoti Bahu's tragedy is the tragedy of an unusual person living at a particular moment of history, within a specific social class. When Bhootnath gets involved in her life, he becomes involved at the same time with her lifestyle and values. In order to save himself from the quicksand of tragedy it is not enough to deny these. It is necessary to oppose them with other values.

Again, it is not enough to place the opposing forces only on the personal level. They must operate on other levels while still retaining their validity on the personal level.

Jaba's character works on the personal level. She is the twin image of Chhoti Bahu in every aspect of character. Chhoti Bahu's plump, indolent body is the exact opposite of Jaba's quick, slim form. Chhoti Bahu's rich bright saris counter Jaba's simple white ones. Chhoti Bahu's dimly lit chamber is the opposite of Jaba's bright, open room. Jaba's movements are springy. Chhoti Bahu's are heavy with languor. Jaba is unadorned. Chhoti Bahu drips with jewellery.

The two characters have a different rhythm; yet both in their different ways love the innocent Bhootnath. But while Chhoti Bahu can only express her love from a distance, Jaba is fairly aggressive in expressing hers.

Chhoti Bahu carries the burden of a heavy past in an elusively un-

certain present. She has but a few warm moments in these last hours of her decaying *haveli* and her decadent class. To Jaba belongs the joyous future with its promise of change.

Delineation of character on this level of contradictory images leaves individuation, typage and caricature behind, and touches the archetypal.

Let us examine the concept of archetype for a moment. Carl Jung discovered during his study of dream images that there are some recurrent images which have no direct links with the individual's actual life. These images occur in the dream of people belonging to different cultures and background. They appear to belong to a collective unconscious. They are also present in the art of different cultures, art that is otherwise different from culture to culture. The collective unconscious forms a part of every individual consciousness. The key images belonging to it are the archetypes.

The image of the Great Mother is one such image. The archetype may be expressed in several ways externally. But when the archetype vitalizes the image completely, it touches our unconscious and affects us in a way that goes beyond the probability or improbability of character.

The greatest Indian director to make a powerful use of archetype is Ritwik Ghatak.

There is no set formula for creating images that are at one moment alive and convincing in external detail, and at the next shed all outward trappings, revealing themselves as powerful archetypes.

There is this kind of capacity in both Chhoti Bahu's and Vijay's character that brings them close to archetypes. But it is not fully realized. So they remain symbols, extremely powerful symbols. But the point is not whether a character becomes a successful archetype, but whether there is an awareness of the archetype, whether there is a desire to go beyond realism, to create something immortal in an environment devoted to the making of commodity films.

Guru Dutt constantly hovers around another archetype, the woman of unearthly beauty who is chosen by death. The latent power of this archetype adds immense force to Chhoti Bahu's image.

Talking about archetype, Ritwik Ghatak says, "If one is conve-

niently trying to lead an image to its conclusion, that does not make up the archetype - at best this can create an allegory. When some images develop as an inevitable consequence and again become inconsequential in the process of turning into symbols, it is only then that the archetypal force is born. The primordial images are tied to a set of cause and effect rules. In this respect it is quite akin to dreams. And dreams are, in fact, the front of the stage of archetypal images”.

This is as far as we go in this analysis of Guru Dutt's dream images and of the world he creates. About his images one can say that they are in the magnetic field of archetype. But that is all.

The archetypal images draw upon the very depths of the unconscious. But they are used as effectively by the worst reactionaries in their art. It is vital that while a work of art reaches the unconscious, it must also significantly affect the conscious mind. The form that allows the artist to achieve this is the epic.

An important difference between tragedy and epic is that in the closed form of tragedy one sees only very vaguely the shapes of future possibilities. In the multi-focal form of the epic, such possibilities may be realized to a greater or lesser degree. The epic absorbs the tragic and leaves the way clear for life.

The inevitability of tragedy is the result of a specific myth and a specific world-view. The epic on the other hand brings together many myths and so escapes the inevitability of tragedy.

Each myth is assumed to be a total world picture. But when many such myths come together in the epic, the completeness of each is questioned and denied.

If tragedy is linked to myth, the epic is linked to history.

If Jaba were viewed merely as an expression of Bhootnath's instinct for self-preservation, we would remain in the world of myth. But the work that Bhootnath chooses to do serves to snap the spell of zamindari values. This brings in the historical context.

Bhootnath begins the work of demolishing the *haveli*. This is not just a coincidence on the narrative level. Unless he destroys it, he cannot free himself from the past. Unless the zamindari system is destroyed, no other creation, no other life is possible.



Waheeda Rehman and Guru Dutt in *Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam*



Meena Kumari in *Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam*

REVIEWS

Just as Guru Dutt approaches the archetype through powerful symbols, his multi-focal form approaches the epic. Thus he denies tragedy. Intimations of the future glimmer faintly here. That in his own life he did not have faith enough in them is his personal tragedy. That he could not create an unflawed epic is the tragedy of our society.

These are excerpts from the book, *In the Realm of Shadows* (translated from the Marathi by Shanta Gokhale). The two sections in the article, although related to each other, come from different parts of the book.

On Godard

Ashish Rajadhyaksha

GODARD : IMAGES, SOUNDS, POLITICS. Colin MacCabe
BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE CINEMA SERIES, 1980

"Two or Three Things I've Heard About Godard -;

"Well, of course I liked Godard's films before '68 but ... (still from *A bout de Souffle* and *Pierrot Le Fou*)

"... since he swallowed all that dogmatic Maoism, he just isn't interested in the cinema anymore (still from *Pravda*)

THUS BEGINS Colin MacCabe's book on Jean-Luc Godard, the first major criticism yet available on the latter part of his work which began, as MacCabe says, in 1968. He continues - "after a decade of influential and prolific filmmaking Jean-Luc Godard disappeared from view." As it turned out, far from having disappeared, Godard in fact made as many as 18 films in the decade following 1968. And for those who thought that he had neared the limits of cinematic improvisation with *Pierrot Le Fou* and *La Chinoise*, this subsequent body of work must appear all the more astonishing. In these 18 films is seen what must definitely be the most intense cinematic investigation yet into the ideological assumptions embedded in all communication within consumerist production-relations. Through these films Godard constantly brings out the fact of how a dominant ideological position is a part of a specific relationship between elements of communication -- or, as Godard says, between sound and image. He also brings out how, while establishing a relationship between the film and its audience, *not* to examine its nature constantly is to fall into a dominant bourgeois position. Thus his latter period is devoted to this examination and, more important, the signification of this examination within the form of the film itself, thus raising it to the conscious level in the audience mind.

For those Indian viewers who have seen the enormous significance of what Godard is doing since 1968 it is evident that even in comparison with his earlier avant-garde cinema, these were new heights. Since in the West a vast silence seems to have descended upon the critics as regards this work, one is particularly grateful for Colin MacCabe's slim volume published by the BFI. Moreover, given the relevance of the Godardian structures to our progressive urban tradition, it is gratifying to see that MacCabe's concerns in writing the book are those we in India can

share - a phenomenon seldom to be observed in the obscurantism of the usual BFI publications.

Around 1967 Godard discovered the work of "someone named Mao who seemed to me to be part of the New Wave"; and from this discovery emerged *La Chinoise*, his first significant break from his earlier work. In this film two very major points of departure were seen. The first was that the film about a group of young Maoist students forming a collective in a vacant flat was his first expressly political film and the second was the intrusion of the camera itself into the frame. Neither was radically new in Godard's work. The Vietnam stylization in *La Chinoise* is reminiscent of the little play that Ferdinand and Marianne put up for American tourists in *Pierrot*; and the intervention by the filmmaker in emphasising the technological divide between him and his audience has been already seen in *Bande à part*, at the point where he switches off the soundtrack. What was new, and what gave these devices new significance, was that Godard was trying here to extend the definition of his struggle within the consumerist society by aligning it with struggle taking place outside, in the Third World. In doing so, he was trying to emerge from the individualist limitations of his earlier avant-gardism, and yet avoid the alternate, more bourgeois romanticism that alignment with different cultures has always implied in advanced countries. And it was in this sense that his discovery of Mao becomes significant.

As MacCabe constantly points out, Godard's later work is not a break with the past, but an extension of the dialectic in the earlier films. In the earlier work, from *A bout de souffle* to *Pierrot*, Godard has used conventions from popular art for his signification - Hollywood cinema, advertising (*Une Femme Mariée*), the comic strip (*Alphaville*), the war movie (*Les Carabiniers*). Apart from using these elements to contrast with the more highbrow psychological approach, Godard was able through their use, to signify the dual level of all bourgeois communication. The code within such communication of what should surface - day-life, conservatism, legalism, honestly earned money - and what should, as it were, be denied as occurring - visceral communication in advertising, women as sex-objects - was not only emphasized but its link with the material base established. That is to say, the manner in which representation in advertising or cinema offers liberation to the consumer in its illegality was presented but by subverting the image to its actual function - that of selling a product - be also demonstrated how it results in fact in extending enslavement.

Consequently the earlier films are the ones in which Godard's concern with women emerges, giving rise to such significant films as *Vivre Sa Vie* (woman as sex-object), *Une Femme Mariee* (woman as consumer) and *Pierrot* (woman as enigma). In fact, as MacCabe points out, it is in his treatment of women that Godard's cinematic form is the most clearly seen - the way he displaces myth, often by confronting cliché with cliché, at times suddenly jerking it to the pathetic level, as in *Vivre Sa Vie*. MacCabe points out that the betrayal of this dual language in Godard's films inevitably comes through visual language: of the characters on screen, of the camera in its perception, and finally of the audience in its response. In the earlier films it was the first, the characters, that predominated. But as Godard's political commitments grew, his concept of cinema in consumerist society also grew to include the latter forms of perception.

What initially brought about the change was Maoism. As MacCabe points out, it wasn't actual Maoism as much as 'Western Maoism' that was the greater influence on Godard. According to him, the moralistic condemnation by the Chinese of the disparities in wealth and of the authoritarian structures in Russia, bequeathed to Maoism's Western followers a concern for the personal lifestyle in determining revolutionary potential. Through Maoism Godard was able to link personal struggle to a commitment towards Third World struggles, and give his position towards the consumer society a broader ideological definition.

The statement of belief, or doubt, comes up in a strange moment in a documentary that Chris Marker made, entitled *Far from Vietnam*. The documentary, made with the help of 12 major directors, including names like Alain Resnais and Claude Lelouch, has a small contribution from Godard. After a brief excerpt from *La Chinoise* we see Godard himself, talking; not directly to the audience, however, but through the eyepiece of his Mitchell camera. Godard speaks of himself, his problems in France and his difficulty of countering American imperialism in art without losing the support of the French working class. He also conveys his doubt about how he can make any worthwhile contribution to the Vietnam struggle. Speaking constantly through his eyepiece, Godard shows how even to communicate one has to do so through technology, often coming from the very societies against whom one is taking a stand. The excerpt in fact indicates why he was never very sympathetic towards the genre of political cinema as pioneered by Chris Marker.

The impact of Maoism, according to MacCabe, was what initially gave rise to this intense self-examination of the processes of communica-

tion within bourgeois society. Very soon after *La Chinoise* Godard concluded that given the tendency to enslave that existed within the dominant production-distribution channels, only one type of cinema could have reality within the dominant system; and that one could only carry on working if one established a different relation, right from the making of a film to the manner of reaching it to the audience. The very structure had to take into consideration the various aspects of filmmaking and film-distribution. At this point MacCabe brings in two of Godard's key slogans, "Film is not a reflection of reality, it is the reality of that reflection", and "This is not a just image, this is just an image" to point out the essence of Godard's thinking.

Very soon after this, Godard formed the Dziga-Vertov group, which made six films in 1969-70. MacCabe points out two reasons why Godard's group decided to name themselves after the Soviet filmmaker. The first was that it had become even more significant for them to take an anti-Eisenstein stand than one pro-Vertov, since Eisenstein's writings on Montage had virtually become the dominant principles of art cinema in France. Arising from this, the group believed that Vertov's use of Montage was the more contemporary, since Eisenstein had indicated the defeat of his form of Montage in 1925 by filming an event (*Battleship Potemkin*) that had occurred 20 years earlier and not a more contemporary one. MacCabe attempts to illustrate his point with yet another Godardian slogan: "Montage before shooting, Montage during the shooting and Montage after the shooting".

It is here that the limitations start surfacing in MacCabe's work. Right through the development of his criticism one constantly senses a certain journalistic streak interweaving the criticism. If one were to define journalism as a form of reportage where, as with the photographic image, all forms of truth are believed to exist on the conscious level, one would see how, in fact, MacCabe reinforces with his style many of the myths about communication that Godard himself was trying to fight

For instance, in speaking of the earlier work which is the one that yields him the key structures for examination, MacCabe takes the position that Godard's romanticism was more a kind of personal hang-up than anything wider in a historical sense. It results in his making the astounding statement that in *Pierrot Le Fou*, in depicting Ferdinand's escape from the confines of his home and job into 19th century romanticism, Godard was giving expression to his own irrational desires, desires which, says MacCabe, crop up when the most rigorous moments of the challenge emerge and Godard's own place in a system of desire

overdetermine his analysis. At one stroke the major achievement of Godard, that of using conventions from the romantic tradition in conflict with the tradition itself to evoke the epic form, is nullified.

In fact MacCabe's conception of the romantic element in Godard is a limited one. He is, for instance, very precise while speaking of the women in his films, but being unable to extend the portrayal of women in consumer society to Godard's other forms of characterization (the brashness of Belmondo, for instance, as a tradition in Godard's own films and related to Hollywood), MacCabe is unable to really use that structure to great effect.

Likewise, a limited perception of the dialectics of any tradition appears to have resulted in his not comprehending the deeper significance of Maoism to Godard's work. The interesting thing about the Maoist phase was in fact that it precisely coincided with the period in which he went through his formalist process having put behind him *Pierrot Le Fou*. *Le Gai Savoir*, for instance, which preaches the need to 'Return to Zero' is never really analysed with the depth that the later *Tout Va Bien* is, because it appears not to play a major role in MacCabe's conception. Although he does point out that the Maoist influence on Godard did not last beyond 1972 - and *Tout Va Bien* - he is unable to give the reasons why.

It is therefore inevitable that he miss out on the importance of the Dziga-Vertov influence. To be very generous to him, he was writing this book before Godard's latest film *Sauve qui peut* was made, and somehow it is in this film that the fragmenting of a bourgeois pattern of perception - or speed of the flow of images - really takes place, reminiscent of Vertov's *Man With the Movie Camera*. But one would be reluctant to extend this generosity because the very conception of technology as the mediating factor - in this case the camera, the projection, the ritual of going for a film - between the filmmaker and his audience, which so pre-occupied Vertov, has been a major concern in Godard's work right through the post 1968 period. If in *Man With the Movie Camera* this resulted in the attempt to capture all reality on film, including the reality of such a capturing, in Godard's work this has given rise to various devices of dislocation of the bourgeois image-sound relationship. For instance the use of caricature in *Vladimir Et Rosa* or the grotesque in *Sauve qui peut*, or the extraordinary structuring of *Tout va Bien* (about which MacCabe does speak in great detail). At times the parallel is striking - the camera tracking in *British Sounds* and the zoom in *Pravda* are amazingly similar to some of the camerawork of *Movie Camera*.

The major limitation in MacCabe is ultimately a lack of openness, in a sense so important while writing about a filmmaker like Godard. He makes a sincere attempt to face up to the demands that Godard's work inevitably imposes on a critical structure, trying to break down the earlier conventions in various ways. For instance, each chapter is preceded by a series of images that attempt to illustrate the chapter itself - the chapter on 'Money and Montage' preceded by a fragmented poster of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*; 'Images of Woman; Images of Sexuality' by make-up advertisements, a model directory; 'Technology' by stills from camera advertisements. And each chapter is concluded by a short interview with Godard himself. Tragically neither works - the former, presumably intended in the style used by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*, never transcend their mere decorativeness, and Godard too emerges all the time as a rather eccentric individual with all his 'ums' and 'ahs' reverently recorded and thus mystified. For those who have seen Godard's interviews with *Cahiers du Cinema* can see how with a good interviewer like Jean Comolli Godard can be extremely articulate and incisive in his comments.

This is not a fault mentioned in passing: it is a key problem. If we consider ourselves in India, trying to face up to the assault of romantic ahistoricism on all our traditions, trying to overcome the very mediocrity of our dominant tradition, the significance of even Godard's romanticism offers us major pointers to the future. If Ritwik Ghatak's work achieves, in its conflict with romanticism, a pattern of significance, comparable with Godard's (always remembering the vast cultural disparity between the two), we now have Mani Kaul's films facing problems that Godard faced just a decade ago. In some cases the tradition had direct links, clearly seen in Kaul's documentary *Arrival*, for instance. Under such circumstances, common to cinema the world over, if MacCabe expected his book to serve any useful purpose at all he should have been much more conscious of the bourgeois forms of individuation and isolation, and should have in his structures combated *that* rather than merely decorated his book with pictures and interviews. He should have been far more aware of the manner in which the faces Godard's work themselves dialectically fit into a tradition.

Perhaps it was after all too much to expect from the British Film Institute.

SPECIAL OFFER: *Ritwik Ghatak: A Return to the Epic* by Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Rs. 45/- will be made available to *Journal of Arts and Ideas* subscribers for Rs. 36.00. Pay by MO to Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 303 Seaside, P. Balu Marg, Prabhadevi, Bombay 400025.

Translating *Shakuntalam*

K.V.K. Sundaram

Three Sanskrit Plays

Translated by Michael Coulson

Penguin Classics, 1981.

“ A PHRASE of poetry drops into the mind like a stone into a pool: the waves go out and out in expanding circles. How soon will they break on a confining shore? It depends on the native abilities and acquired culture of each individual mind. A dull uneducated spirit is a mere narrow well, narrow between walls; but in a lively and cultivated mind the waves can run on for the imaginative equivalent of miles and hours.” So says Aldous Huxley. “Ay, there’s the rub”, says to himself the Englishman who has bravely undertaken the task of rendering into his language the great classic of Kalidasa, *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*.

He could credit himself with a lively and cultivated mind but has to acknowledge that the culture in which it has taken shape and substance is far removed in time and space from the play. He is not optimistic that the few years he has devoted to the study of Sanskrit language and literature will suffice to bring him near enough to the spirit of the play, to establish a *sahridayatvam* with the poet-dramatist. Nor is he satisfied that such competence as he has in his own language will be able to bridge the inevitable gap between the original and the translation and endow the latter with something of the wave-producing power postulated by Huxley for poetic passages.

It appears from his introduction to *Three Sanskrit Plays* that the late Mr. Michael Coulson set about his task with considerable diffidence in his own capability. He considers that “in the end there are no degrees of success, only degrees of failure”, particularly for translators of Sanskrit poetry, and “to translate a Sanskrit stanza so that it merely bores rather than bewilders can be an achievement in itself.” It cannot be said that he found Kalidasa’s stanzas boring or bewildering, for a few pages later he is all praise for the limpidity of the poet’s style and for

the total control of his language which enables him to write such deceptively simple Sanskrit. Why then should it be the despair of any translator, as Mr. Coulson puts it, unless his command of his own language is not of a high order, sufficient at any rate to convey the poetic quality of the text? Mr. Coulson seems to confess as much by admitting that his "translations are often extremely low-key".

Alexander Pope whose translation of Homer is regarded as a classic in itself remarks in his preface to *The Iliad*:-

"I know no liberties one ought to take but those which are necessary for transferring the spirit of the original and supporting the poetical style of the translation.... Some of his translators have swelled into fustian while others have sunk into flatness in a cold and timorous notion of simplicity.... Of the two extremes one would sooner pardon frenzy than frigidity."

Reading through Mr. Coulson's translation one comes across passages which are not only in low-key but also contain misinterpretations of the text. For instance, in the sixth act of the play, the stanza beginning with *svapno nu maya nu* is rendered (page 129):-

"Whether it was a dream, an illusion, a mental aberration,
or whether it simply exhausted all that was due me for past good deeds,
I am quite certain all hope is gone-
Over the precipice and beyond recall."

What Dushyanta is bemoaning as gone, perhaps for ever, is not hope but the very real experience of loving Shakuntala which now seems like a dream; and "gone over the precipice" is a complete mistake. A more faithful and less flat translation of the stanza would be:- Oh tell me, friend, was it a dream / or an illusion caused by spell or magic? / Was I bereft of mind, or being real / did the guerdon of my past good deeds / reach its predestined end all too soon? / It has gone, never to return. And like / the earthen banks of a river in flood / my hopes fall, and fall again.

In the humorous and lively prelude to the same act, where the guards question the fisherman caught selling the fateful signet ring and the superintendent loftily sneers at his very clean occupation, he comes out with a shattering reply in Prakrit verse. Mr. Coulson's translation (page 120) reads:-

"They say that if a man's born to a trade
He shouldn't give it up however low it may be.
Even the softest-hearted butcher
Is in the cruel job of slaughtering animals."

It is impossible to understand where he gets the reference to the butcher from when the text refers to a *sottia* - *srotriya* in Sanskrit learned brahmin in English. The fisherman is having a dig at the holy brahmin when he says, "The learned brahmin, most tender-hearted, cruelly kills animals (at sacrifices), does he not?"

Since Sanskrit plays were written for a highly educated and sophisticated audience it was natural that the dialogues should be a free mixture of prose and verse. This raises for the English translator the problem of method for the adequate rendering of the stanzas. The great Sanskrit scholar Monier Williams felt that the first translation of *Shakuntalam*, all in prose, made by Sir William Jones at the end of the eighteenth century was not adapted to meet the needs of a great play and opted for blank verse as the uniform vehicle for rendering the great variety of metres in which the *shlokas* were composed. Fifty years later, in 1910, A.W. Ryder took a different view and chose the rhymed verse as the medium of translation. The result was not a conspicuous success, however. The short couplets fail to convey the rich euphonious melody of a *shardula-vikriditam* or a *shikharini shloka*. For instance, the famous *Shloka* with which Kanva comes on the stage in the fourth act is translated by Ryder, "Shakuntala must go today; / I miss her now at heart; / I dare not speak a loving word / Or choking tears will start."

Mr. Coulson decides to keep carefully the distinction between prose and verse in his translation, and so far verse is concerned, to adhere to the four-line structure of the original in the hope, as he puts it, of suggesting something of the variety of the metres. His poetic talent however is not up to the task. In the result the free verse of his four-lined stanzas fails to suggest either the form or the cadence of the *shlokas*. The reason seems to me to be lack of style, and even of felicity of expression.

Upama Kalidasasya is a common evocation of his poesy among us. The translator's task is hardest when he comes up against a breath-taking simile of the poet, meditates on it and tries to recapture its fulness and intensity in the other language. If his grasp of the original is complete he will not omit to give due place to every significant word in his rendering. For instance, stanza 21 (Mr. Coulson's numbering) in the fourth

act has a fine simile in the third line - *tanayam achirat prachivarkam prasuya cha pavanam*. While it is obvious to any sanskritist that the last word is essential, Mr. Coulson drops it altogether in his translation which reads -

“When, not long from now, you bear him an heir as the East brings forth the sun”

With two small changes the line will read better:- When ere long you bear him a son, / pure and splendid like the Sun the East brings forth.”

Another instance is furnished by the last stanza of the first act which is rendered by Mr. Coulson -

“My body moves onwards,
But my unsteady mind runs back
Like the silk of a banner
Carried into the wind.”

Apart from the inaccuracy in translating *asanstutam* as unsteady, the force of the simile is hardly brought out, and in trying to remain close to the text, line by line, the translation falls flat. A freer rendering would be, “Reluctant like the flagstaff borne against the wind / my body moves forward / but my dissonant mind / fluttering like the silken flag/ rushes back.”

Accuracy is not a strong point with Mr. Coulson. Towards the end of the fourth act, where Shakuntala asks Kanva when she will be seeing the hermitage again, his beautiful reply is translated (at page 202)-

“When you have long been co-wife with the wide earth,
And when you have borne Dushyanta as son unrivalled in battle,
You will hand over the burden to that son, and you and he
Will set foot once more in this hermitage to gain peace of mind.”

The reference to *Daushyanti* in the text does not need the expansion in the second line, whereas the ancient concept of the queen being the *sapatni* of the earth requires a bit more than a translation of the word. (In any case “co-wife” is horrid.) The idiomatic phrase *karishyasi padam* means something more than setting foot. Lastly, the meaningful vocative *shante* is to be preferred to the reading *shantyai*. Kanva’s reply may be rendered:- Listen, dear child. After reigning long / as Dushyanta’s

queen, sharing his love and care / with his domain the four-cornered
 earth, / you will see your unrivalled warrior son / established at the
 helm and your husband / transferring to him the cares of state.
 That will be the time when, together with / your lord and undisturbed
 in mind you will / find your place in this hermitage."

It is a pity that Mr. Coulson bases his translation on Pischel's edition (1877) of the Bengali recension of the text, although he found it unsatisfactory. The curious reader will find the problem of recensions discussed at length by Dr. V. Raghavan in his preface to the Sahitya Akademi edition of the play. There he indicates that the Bengali and Kashmiri recensions are inflated by the addition of inferior and repetitive material and adversely criticised by many scholars. Unfortunately the task of producing a critical edition of the great classic has been left incomplete by the Akademi.



A scene from Prasanna's *Tughlaq*

About *Tughlaq*

Madan Gopal Singh

IF WE ARE to understand Prasanna's *Tughlaq* in the light of the controversy that resulted in a permanent setback to the production, we cannot fail to keep in mind a context larger than that immediately visible. In this case the setback is not that the production was commissioned by a governmental or semi-governmental agency for the purposes of the promotion of official culture, or that it was scuttled because of its unpalatability to official aesthetics. We may, if we so desire, put the months of hard work and expenditure in the notwithstanding bracket. All that is there, but the real location of this setback will be found in an altogether different site: the site of *the struggle of tendencies*. In the light of this controversy, it has become all the more difficult to view this production as an exercise in innocent theatre. Indeed, it does not seem to me to be an overstatement to suggest that within this struggle of tendencies what happened to Prasanna's *Tughlaq* is a miniscule image of a general, though much more serious, setback to the independent cinema that the NFDC's recent resolve to go fully commercial has made it suffer. And I wonder if the same argument cannot be extended to the as yet 'unlegislated' Bihar Press Bill.

For even when one looks at this production in itself, granting it the autonomy that is above all its due, one cannot dissociate it from a certain post-Independence situation in theatre, from a perspective where antagonistic tendencies come to be concretized as a result of the conscious intervention by various artists. Viewed thus, it becomes imperative for us to consider this production as constituting a break within the struggle of tendencies.

What is it breaking from and what is the nature of this break? These questions will become clear if we take a look at the earlier NSD productions of *Tughlaq* and its short mesmerizing history that cast its spell on the subsequent developments in, at least, Delhi theatre.

But before that a few questions: where is *Tughlaq*, the text, situated in this struggle? What is its validity as literature? What were the possible compulsions for Prasanna to choose this text in preference to others? We have Girish Karnad's own sympathetic reference to the aborted Nehruvian dreams (utopia?) which should give us some indication as to its real position. On the other hand, there are not unjustifiable shades of *Ivan the Terrible* which should tell us something about the complexity that Karnad is able to bring into motion to create a mythology - an individual's *hystory*. But I have a feeling that ever since *Tughlaq* and its production by E. Alkazi, Delhi theatre has not been able to emerge from this narcissistic vision of complexity. In my view, therefore, there is a definite tactical advantage, if nothing else, in choosing *Tughlaq* - for it represents a point of culmination in the theatre that ruled supreme for the better part of the sixties. This theatre, represented among others by Mohan Rakesh's *Aadhe Adhure*, Vijay Tendulkar's *Shantata Court Chaalu Aahe* and Badal Sarkar's *Evam Indrajit*, prospered through a negation of *history* in favour of *hystory*; of language in favour of rhetoric ... And it was precisely in denuding this *hystoria* and rhetoric of its false sensuousness and in countering the whole process of its development that the chief merit of Prasanna's *Tughlaq* lay. No other text set in the above genre could have produced the necessary rupture, and the reckoning. That seems to me to be the tactical advantage.

To return to the mesmerizing history of *Tughlaq*'s productions extending from the ruins of Ferozeshah Kotla to those of Purana Qila through the open air of Meghdoot theatre, one can visualize the protagonist perched atop a flight of classical steps projecting himself as ultimate presence, the more so as it 'materializes' through the so-called history, the monuments. (Monuments--craft--rhetoric--*hystory*, seems to be their operational equation.) Such literal identification with space may indeed sound ridiculous today, but in the hands of an expert craftsman like E. Alkazi, it had assumed such an overwhelming sensuousness that the *hystoria* that followed was at once naturalized. (The tools and craft at the disposal of such 'naturalists' are by no means crude as the productions of E. Alkazi eloquently testify.) As is characteristic of such theatre, it was propped up on the 'motif of emergence' from the beginning to the end. Thus in Alkazi's production, *Tughlaq* does not walk onto the stage, but emerges from behind a flight of steps. This revelatory emergence draws our attention to the other inaccessible steps, to a whole other-worldly metaphysics, and fills us with awe right in the beginning. Even as he lies vanquished, in cathartic resignation, he is still perched above, reflecting a lofty contempt for history -- for all that goes on

'below'. He emerges and vanishes as a revenant; all the while the non-tactile is rendered real on the props of costumes, set designing, lighting and sound effects, classical blockings and above all, the location of the theatric action amongst real historic monuments that seem to accelerate the process of naturalizing to such a degree that the theatric space, already endangered by the open air, is most effectively dissolved.

This then was the challenge that Prasanna faced when he took up *Tughlaq*.

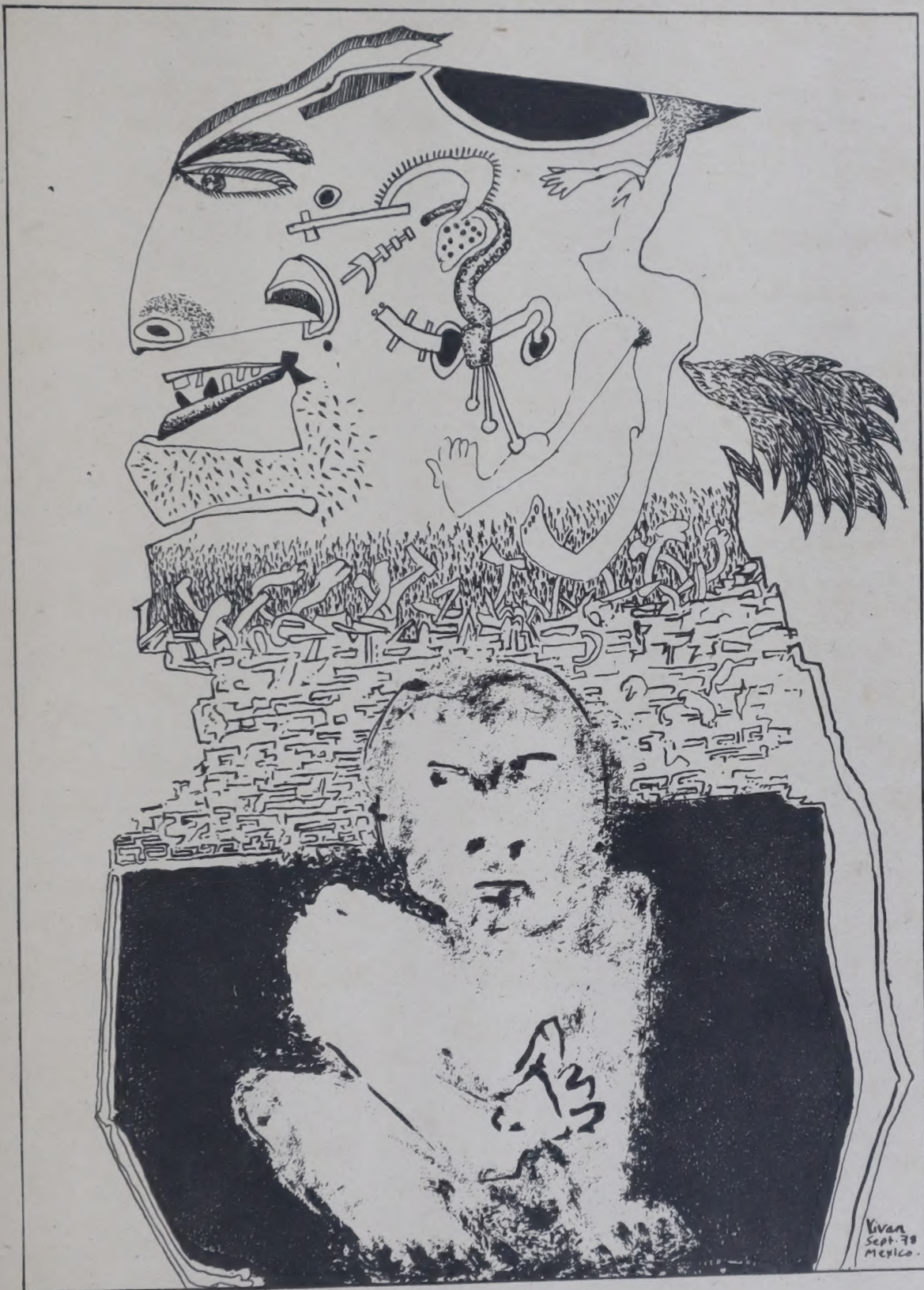
Almost the first thing Prasanna does is to take *Tughlaq* indoors. It is not that he is playing a simple game of indoorizing. His primary concern seems to be to reclaim the theatric space that the naturalizers of *hystoria* seem to have lost through an unending string of *Tughlaqs*. Tughlaq no longer stands on the real though dilapidated ramparts of Purana Qila; he now stands behind a collapsible curtain which is firmly grounded in the history of theatre. No simple transference this, from the natural-real to the theatric, for it implies a comparable mastery of the tools and craft. And these in turn have a demystifying function making the production a significant constituent in the historic 'break' I have already spoken about.

The use of the curtain in the reorganization of the theatric space, in denuding *hystoria* of its implicit and naturalized stand against history is original. The curtain is used here not neutrally (to perpetuate convention) but to secure for theatre its autonomy. This helps in the dissolution of the 'motif of emergence' which in turn helps to deconstruct, through an accompanying element of parody, the textual rhetoric. Thus there are no invincible flights of steps, no other-worldly metaphysics - only a curtain that merely divides the space or, even when it becomes a prop, remains a curtain in the last instance. He constantly contradicts its use as a backdrop and steps on to the other side of the imaginary line. Thus while Tughlaq is fulminating from the 'sky-rocketing' ramparts of his Daulatabad fort, gone is the grandeur of the Alkazian *hystoria*. Instead, a bitter realization of his collision with history (a contradiction in which he does not have even an outside chance of succeeding - a fact that Alkazi's production mystified) is brought to the fore. Indeed so painful has been this process of de-rhetoricization that an actor like Manohar Singh seemed ill at ease in Tughlaq's role. For, in order to bring parody into play, one has first of all to put the traditional rhetoric (inside the text as also inside the production) attached with *Tughlaq* under erasure. This means that the play would have to be first

of all reconstructed as language; to be understood as theatre, that is. This also implies that the focal emphasis would be contradictions, and not the psychic aberrations of an individual.

It is not surprising that in Prasanna's *Tughlaq*, there is an important shift of emphasis from the lofty Tughlaq to the lumpen Aziz. He and his conscience-ridden lieutenant are not insignificantly employed to fix the curtain here as a prop and to draw it there as a drop. Aziz seems to realize, as do the audiences, that there is as much action in front of the curtain as there is behind it - theatrically and therefore politically. As such they know that the *hystoria* that Tughlaq the individual is trying to project is exploded by the element of parody - by the curtain, by the dislocated emphasis, by theatre in short. The struggle of tendencies is thus beginning to be understood.

The last sequence of Prasanna's *Tughlaq* succinctly sums up the nature of its 'break'. Unlike the Alkazian Tughlaq perched atop a flight of steps in contemptuous resignation, the Tughlaq in this production actually goes off to sleep in front of the curtain beside Barni, the historian and also, not insignificantly, in front of the audiences. The historian quietly gets up and covers his body with an ordinary bed-sheet. That indeed is the only funereal concession that rhetoric receives from Prasanna.



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